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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 6 MAY 2024 | MONDAY | BENGALURU | 26 SHAWWAL, 1445 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 107 | Pages: 8

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2nd phase of LS seats campaigning ends in K'taka

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

The campaigning for the second phase of polling in 14 Lok Sabha segments in Congress-ruled Karnataka ended on Sunday, with the "Hassan sex scandal" wading into the narrative in no small measure.

Tuesday's elections matter the most for BJP as it had bagged all those 14 seats in the 2019 polls. Karnataka has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The first phase of elections for 14 segments was held on 26 April. Congress leaders including Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra have targeted the BJP over the alleged sex scandal involving Hassan JD(S) MP, Prajwal Revanna, in campaign rallies.

Rahul Gandhi alleged that Prajwal Revanna had raped 400 women, and lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for seeking votes for a "mass rapist" and sought his apology. Prajwal, grandson of former prime minister and JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda, is facing allegations of sexually abusing women. The state government has set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the charges.

Prajwal Revanna was the JD(S)-BJP alliance candidate from Hassan seat which went to polls on April 26. JD(S) joined the BJP-led NDA in September last year.

BJP, on the other hand, has attacked the government for alleged failure to "contain anti-national activities", and incidents of 'Love Jihad' and 'appeasement politics'. The party leaders repeatedly referred to the bomb blast at a cafe here on 1 March, the murder of 23-year-old Neha Hiremath on a college campus in Hubballi by Fayaz Khondunaik on 18 April and the raising of pro-Pakistan slogans in the corridors of Vidhana Soudha on 27 February.

Tuesday's elections matter the most for BJP as it had bagged all those 14 seats in the 2019 polls **PHOTO: PTI**

- Tuesday's elections matter the most for BJP as it had bagged all those 14 seats in the 2019 polls. Karnataka has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The first phase of elections for 14 segments was held on 26 April

Speaking to reporters in the district headquarters town of Belagavi, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah today said, "In the first phase, we will win about eight to nine seats. In the second phase, we will win in 10 constituencies."

Among the candidates in the fray for the May 7 polls is Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, who is seeking a fifth straight term from Dharwad. There will be a by-poll to the Shorapur Assembly constituency in Yadgir district on 7 May following the death of Congress MLA Raja Venkatappa Naik in February this year. The 14 constituencies have 2.59 crore voters, the EC said, adding, there are a total of 28,257 main polling stations. *—PTI*

Cong to give financial aid to Prajwal's 'rape victims'

Revanna calls his arrest an outcome of political conspiracy

BELAGAVI, 5 MAY

Congress government in Karnataka will provide financial assistance to those allegedly sexually assaulted by JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, the national party said on Sunday.

Congress General Secretary and the party's Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala made this announcement at a press conference here in the presence of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

He said former Congress president Rahul Gandhi had demanded that appropriate action be taken against the accused. "Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has announced financial assistance to the rape victims who are in hundreds, since it is a unique case which has never happened in the last 75 years," Surjewala said. Prajwal, the JD(S)-BJP alliance candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha constituency, is the grandson of former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda and nephew of former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy.

He is wanted in a case pertaining to rape and molestation after hundreds of explicit videos allegedly came out in open.

Surjewala charged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah with protecting their alliance partner JD(S) candidate, who is a 'mass rapist'.

Meanwhile, Holenarasipura MLA HD Revanna on Sunday called his arrest over the allegations of abducting a woman, whom Revanna's son is alleged to have sexually abused, an outcome of a political conspiracy.

Revanna was brought to the court by the members of a Special Investigation Team (SIT). The SIT is investigating sexual abuse allegations involving his son and Hassan JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, after a huge cache of explicit videos allegedly involving Prajwal sexually abusing several women surfaced in the public domain and were widely shared. *—PTI*

JD(S) MLA HD Revanna taken to Bowring Hospital for medical checkup, in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Arrested Revanna goes for medical test

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

JD (S) leader HD Revanna, who was taken to State Investigation Team office to complete the arrest formalities, was subjected to mandatory medical tests at Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital. After undergoing tests for 90 minutes, Revanna was taken back to SIT office.

—ANI with other agencies

Blue corner notice issued against Prajwal

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara on Sunday said a Blue Corner notice has been issued and Interpol's help is being taken to bring NDA's Hassan Lok Sabha candidate Prajwal Revanna, who is facing sexual harassment cases, back to India. A Blue Corner Notice is issued by the international police cooperation body to collect additional information from its member countries about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime. The Minister said, "Already Blue Corner notice has been issued.

—PTI

Mother throws 6-yr-old into croc-infested river

DANDELI, 5 MAY

A 26-year-old woman allegedly threw her six-year-old disabled son into a crocodile-infested river at Dandeli taluk in this district following a quarrel with her husband, police said on Sunday.

The couple often fought over their elder son, who is speech-disabled since birth. They have another two-year-old son.

Savitri's husband Ravi Kumar, 27, used to quarrel with her over son's disability and questioned why she gave birth to such a child. Police said he used to allegedly tell her to "throw the child away".

Police said another fight ensued on Saturday evening, when Savitri allegedly threw her elder son into a waste canal directly linked to Kali river, which is infested with crocodiles.

Vinod **PHOTO: SALAR**

Police reached the spot and with the help of locals and divers, conducted a search operation to rescue the child.

On Sunday morning, the police retrieved the body with severe injuries, bite marks and a missing hand, indicating that the child was attacked by crocodiles. The body was sent for post mortem. *—PTI*

BENGALURU'S FORECAST

Yesterday
Min temp: 24°C
Max temp: 37°C

Today
Min temp: 24.1°C
Max temp: 37°C

BJP won't change Constitution, says Rajnath

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

BJP government will never change the Constitution or end reservation, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, accusing Congress of creating "fear psychosis" and resorting to spreading misinformation for "vote bank" politics. Singh blasted Congress for spreading "canards" that BJP will change the Constitution if it returns to power and especially asserted that there was no question of changing the of the Constitution. His assurance that the Preamble will not be changed addresses concerns among critics that the word 'secular' to describe India could be removed by BJP.Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been alleging that BJP will "tear up and throw away" Constitution if it retains power. Other Congress leaders had expressed apprehensions that BJP may drop word "secularism" from Constitution. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 3

City man says wife is missing, held for her murder

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

The City police have arrested a man who allegedly killed his wife and then filed a missing complaint on Sunday. Veena, 19-year-old women, who resided in Karanahalli, Doddaballapura, went missing on 22 April. Concerned for her whereabouts, her husband Ravi lodged a missing complaint with the Doddaballapura rural police. According to Doddaballapur Rural police officer, "Ravi's motive for the murder stemmed was an extramarital affair he was having with neighbour, which Veena had discovered, leading to frequent domestic disputes. During the interrogation Ravi revealed that he lured Veena from her workplace, where he murdered her and attempted to conceal the crime by burning her body beyond recognition with petrol." On 22 April, a forest guard discovered a charred body in the forest area. *—Salar News*

BMRCL to come up with 16 interchange stations

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

In the next five years, the City is set to get 16 interchange stations slated for construction within the metro network, facilitating seamless connectivity.

Currently the 'Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Station Majestic' stands as the sole interchange station at Majestic, accommodating over 50,000 passengers daily. The The Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation (BMRCL) aims to introduce more interchange stations for Purple, Green, Blue, Red, Yellow and Orange lines to alleviate congestion.

In Phase 2, Blue metro line along with interchange stations to come up linking from Kasturba Nagar to Devanahalli International Airport and a total of 16 interchange stations will be established. 'Jayadeva Interchange' on the Yellow Line, connecting RV Road to Bommasandra, is expected to be inaugurated by year-end. Serving as a crucial link between the pink and yellow corridorswith 95 per cent of construction already completed across its 19,826 sq km area.

Interchanges will occur at Majestic for passengers transitioning between the green and blue lines, with additional interchanges planned for the purple and green lines.

—Salar News

INTERCHANGE STATIONS

- KR Puram station to connect from Purple to Blue line
- MG Road to connect from Purple to Pink line
- Hosahalli to connect from Purple to Orange line
- Mysore Road from Purple to Orange line
- Peenya from Green to Orange
- RV Road Road from Green to Yellow line
- JP Nagar from Green to Orange line
- JP Nagar 4th Stage from Pink to Orange
- Jayadeva from Pink line to Yellow line
- Dairy Circle from Pink to Red line
- Nagavara from Pink to Blue line
- Kempapura Blue to Orange
- Hebbal from Blue to Red
- Agara from Blue to Red Line
- Silk Board from Blue to Yellow Orange line

MODI OFFERS PRAYERS AT RAM TEMPLE, HOLDS ROADSHOW

AYODHYA, 5 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday offered prayers at the Ram temple in Ayodhya and held a roadshow, on his first visit to the holy town since the consecration at the shrine on 22 January. In a televised ceremony two days ahead of the third phase of the Lok Sabha elections, Modi was seen prostrating before the Ram Lalla idol. Earlier in the day, he had addressed rallies in Etawah and Sitapur. The entrance gates to the temple were decorated with flowers, with 'Om' formed with yellow petals. According to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, Ram Lalla seated in the temple wore a light pink attire on Sunday. *—PTI*

LAND TITLING ACT

AP CID books case against Chandrababu

HYDERABAD, 5 MAY

Andhra Pradesh CID booked a case against Chandrababu Naidu, his son Nara Lokesh, and others for alleged fake campaign on Land Tilting Act, on Sunday. This was done following the order of Election Commission. A case was registered at the CID Police Station in Mangalagiri under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). FIR and evidence, including a pendrive with audio files, were submitted. CID responded to a complaint by the YSR Congress Party.

The complaint was initiated by Malladi Vishnuvardan, MLA of Vijayawada Central Assembly, who reported that voters were receiving IVR calls with messages urging them not to vote for YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and instead support Chandrababu Naidu.

The IVR calls were allegedly made by Telugu Desam as part of their political campaign. The content of the calls was considered a violation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) because it spread false information and made personal attacks on political rivals. MCC guidelines prohibit the spread of unverified allegations and restrict criticism to policies, programmes, and past records.

Chandrababu Naidu **PHOTO: PTI**

handrababu Naidu has promised to implement 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in Andhra Pradesh upon winning the assembly elections.' Naidu's promise of reservation for Muslims comes at a time when the BJP has strongly refuted it so far. *—Agency*

IN PUNJAB

Teen beaten to death over 'sacrilege'

FEROZEPUR, 5 MAY

A 19-year-old youth was beaten to death following an alleged sacrilege incident that took place at a gurdwara here on Saturday, police said.

Bakshish Singh, a resident of Talli Gulam village, allegedly tore some pages of the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, after entering the premises of the gurdwara in Bandala village, they said.

His father Lakhwinder Singh said that Bakshish was mentally disturbed and was undergoing treatment for it.

He called on the police to register a case against those who killed his son.

A videograb shows Bakshish Singh being assaulted

According to police, Bakshish allegedly tore some pages of the Guru Granth Sahib and then tried to flee. He was caught by some people and as the news of the alleged incident spread, and villagers assembled at the gurdwara and thrashed the youth, they said.

He later succumbed to injuries, police said.

Police registered the First Information Report (FIR) against Bakshish under section 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings or beliefs) of the Indian Penal Code at the Arif Ke Police Station on a complaint lodged by Lakhvir Singh, chairman, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Committee. Police have also registered an FIR against unidentified people on the complaint of Bakshish's father. *—PTI*

5 held for giving money to voters in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 5 MAY

Four Congress supporters of Belagavi constituency candidate Mrinal Hebbalkar were apprehended while allegedly distributing Rs 1,000 from house to house in Ankalagi village of Gokak taluk on Saturday. Following this, BJP workers apprehended the perpetrators. About Rs 20 lakh rupees were found from the Congress supporters. Among those detained were Dr Mahantesh Kadadi, who contested from Gokak and lost, two youths from Bhadravati, and two employees of the Harsha Sugars factory. During police interrogation, two of the detainees confessed that they were instructed by Congress leaders, including Kadadi to distribute money on behalf of Mrinal.

—Salar News

ICSE Result 2024

CISCE 10th & 12th Class Result

PHOTO: PTI

CISCE to declare ICSE, ISC results today

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

The results of Class 10 (ICSE) and Class 12 (ISC) board exams will be announced today at 11am. Students can access their scores on the official CISCE websites — cisce.org or results.cisce.org. The announcement will be made during a press conference held at the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) office in New Delhi. CISCE has discontinued compartment exams for both ICSE and ISC from 2024 onwards. Students seeking to improve their marks can appear for the improvement examination in a maximum of two subjects later this year in July. Details regarding the improvement exams will be available soon on the CISCE website.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Tiger captured in Mysuru after public sighting

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

Karnataka Forest Department officials, on Sunday, captured an eight-year-old male tiger that had sparked panic among residents in the HD Kote area. The tiger was spotted near Discovery Village Resort close to Kabini backwater in Malali village on Saturday afternoon. Responding to public concern, forest officials swiftly deployed and administered anaesthetic to safely capture the tiger. According to DCF Harsh Kumar of Chiknaragunda, the tiger was previously observed in the designated safari zone. Following its capture, forest officials reportedly released the tiger back into a safe area within the forest. *—Salar News*

K'taka: IMD issues thunderstorm, heatwave alerts

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued alerts for a heatwave coupled with evening thunderstorms in North Interior Karnataka. Districts such as Bidar, Yadagiri, Kalaburagi, Raichur, Bagalkot, Ballari, Vijayanagara, and Vijayapura are expected to endure uncomfortably hot weather conditions, with temperatures ranging between 41°C to 44.5°C. Meanwhile, other districts like Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri, Davanagere, Koppala, and Shivamogga will be experiencing temperatures ranging from 38 degree celcius to 40.5 degree celcius.Rainfall for the upcoming days might touch 30mm to 90mm in Bengaluru,and the variable precipitation levels across the City." *—Salar News*

Cong files complaint against Nadda for poll code violation

In a video, he allegedly asks SCs & STs not to vote for a candidate

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) on Sunday sought the Election Commission to initiate action against BJP's national President JP Nadda and other senior leaders for allegedly violating the model code of conduct by posting a video on social media intimidating members of SC and ST community not to vote for a particular candidate.

In a complaint to Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer, Congress mentioned about a video uploaded on social media platform 'X' by the official account of Karnataka State BJP @bjp4karnataka which is operated by Amit Malviya, the head of IT cell on instructions of JP Nadda, BJP National President, BY Vijayendra, BJP State President and Social Media incharge- Karnataka BJP on 4 May at 5.34pm.

"The said video posted on social media featured animated characters of Rahul Gandhi and Siddaramaiah. In the clip, SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as "eggs" in a nest and it also suggested Rahul Gandhi planting a big egg labelled as Muslim community. It is projected as though funds are being fed to the chick depicting the Muslim community, which then kicks out SC, ST and OBC community."

The letter also stated that nowhere in Congress manifesto has it been mentioned that allocations of funds to SC, ST and OBC community will be cut and the same will be diverted to the Muslim community.

The KPCC further alleged that the video was posted on BJP's official X handle with an aim to garner votes in Lok Sabha polls. "The act of the accused person is to wantonly provocate rioting and promote enmity between different religions and is prejudicial to maintenance of harmony apart from intimidating members of SC/ST community not to vote for particular candidate and causing enmity against members of SC/ST community," the letter added. KPCC has urged the poll body to initiate suitable action.

—PTI

BJP National President JP Nadda PHOTO: PTI

- Congress mentioned about a video uploaded on social media platform 'X' by the official account of Karnataka State BJP @bjp4karnataka which is operated by Amit Malviya, the head of IT cell on instructions of JP Nadda, BJP National President, BY Vijayendra, BJP State President and Social Media incharge- Karnataka BJP on 4 May at 5.34pm

AMID HEATWAVE

Sericulture dept issues precautions for silkworm rearing

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

Sericulture Department has issued a precautionary advisory regarding silkworm rearing in light of the heatwave in the City. The department highlighted that during the summer months, silkworm crops are particularly vulnerable to mulberry diseases and scabies, exacerbated by the erratic weather conditions over the high temperatures and low humidity.

Protective measures include plastering sericulture caves along the walls of worm rearing houses to shield crops from direct sunlight, particularly on the south and west-facing walls. Windows should be periodically moistened with water to maintain a cool environment. Additionally, roofs should be insulated with thick coconut husk to prevent excessive heat absorption. Watering should be administered twice daily, ideally between 11:30am to 12:00pm and 4:00pm to 5:00pm using drip or sprinkler irrigation systems.

Applying lime to roofs of worm rearing houses helps prevent heat build-up, helps control diseases and bed disinfectants should be applied at each stage to prevent germ growth due to increased moisture content.

Further the department noted that the silk farmers should move harvested greens into the rearing house to prevent moisture loss. To enhance cooling, water pots to be hung inside the house and wet gunny bags spread on the floor will contribute to cooling the room.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

PREP BEFORE RAINS

Complete all civic works by 30 May: BBMP officials told

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP Chief) Commissioner Tushar Girinath has instructed zonal officers to initiate the cleaning of the City's drains and canals by 10 May to mitigate the risk of flooding due to pre-monsoon rains.

In a bid to enhance responsiveness during pre-monsoon and monsoon periods, eight control rooms have been established across all zones to address citizen concerns promptly.

These control rooms, comprising officials from various departments including BESCOM, the water board, and the forest department, will work to address issues arising from adverse weather conditions.

Addressing reporters, Girinath noted the importance of proactive measures in light of the Meteorological Department's forecast predicting pre-monsoon showers in the upcoming days. He said, "Efforts are underway to prevent potential flooding by focusing on the removal of waste and silt accumulated in drains and canals, with zonal officers tasked to oversee the cleaning process."

Girinath said, "BBMP started a 15-day intensive cleaning of its storm water drains from 19 April till 3 May now the cleaning activity has been extended till 10 May other agencies like Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) also keep doing their work involving road cutting and other necessities. We have asked them to speed up and complete their work by 20 May."

Furthermore, Girinath announced the designation of the third week of every month as Sewage and Canal Cleaning Week across BBMP limits, aimed at curbing the buildup of silt and waste in drainage systems.

Zonal officers have been instructed to prepare accordingly for this initiative. Additionally, stringent measures are being implemented to address the disposal of construction waste on roadsides.

—Salar News

Tushar Girinath PHOTO: PTI

NEET UG 2024

Students arrive to write National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test at Jain College in Bengaluru on Sunday. 1.54 lakh students sat for the test in Karnataka PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

FIR FILED AGAINST DINGALESHWARA PONTIFF

DHARWAD, 5 MAY

An FIR has been registered lodged against Dingaleshwar Swamiji for allegedly making a hate speech targeting different communities during an election rally on Sunday. The case was filed based on a complaint lodged by election officers at the Navalgund police station in Dharwad district. The incident unfolded during the Swabhimani Voter's Conference held at the Navalgund market, where he made controversial remarks. He said, "Bhasma went and saffron came, and Bhandara went and saffron came," while also criticizing BJP candidate Prahlad Joshi by saying, "Sharanu Saranarthi went and Hari Om came." Responding to Swamiji's comments against BJP candidate Joshi, Vijayapura MLA Yatnal said, "I am aware of who is orchestrating these attacks against Joshi through Swamiji. However, the people of the country are unequivocal in their desire to see Narendra Modi return as Prime Minister. Joshi's victory is assured, regardless of any attempts to defame him." *—Salar News*

Congress has fulfilled all guarantees, sure of win: CM

BELAGAVI, 5 MAY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has expressed confidence in Congress winning at least 20 out of 28 seats ahead of the second phase of polling in the State.

Addressing a joint press conference along with Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Congress General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala in Belagavi on Sunday, Siddaramaiah asserted that Congress government have fulfilled all the five guarantees that voted them to power in the State.

"As today evening campaigning will end, on 7 May there will be voting. On 26 April last phase election as per our information we'll win 8-9 seats. In this second phase, we'll win more than 10 seats as per our information by the workers. At least 20 seats we will win, we are confident because we have fulfilled all 5 promises that we announced. Without any middle man, guarantee cheques will reach every individual through me and Shivakumar," Siddaramaiah said.

Siddaramaiah further hit out at Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman over the GST compensation issue with the State. *—ANI*

Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

It's Congress' promises versus BJP's falsehood: DKS

BELAGAVI, 5 MAY

Addressing the press conference in Belagavi, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "We have fulfilled all our promises. BJP has been betraying people for 10 years with its false promises."

BJP does politics of emotion but refuses to address issues pertaining to the livelihood of people. He said, "It was the Siddaramaiah government which brought Karnataka Scheduled Castes Sub-Allocation & Tribal-Sub Allocation (Planning, Allocation and Utilisation of Financial Resources) Act, 2013 (SCP-TSP) legislation and allocated budgets to communities.

This year, we have allocated Rs 39,000 crores for SC, ST and the poor while BJP has been ignoring this segment of people." Shivakumar said that State government has taken up many irrigation projects in this part of the State including Upper Krishna and Upper Bhadra projects. "BJP hasn't done anything and they don't have any moral right to ask for votes. We will implement our tax system and implement Mekedatu, Bhadra projects. Centre announced Rs 5300 crore for Upper Bhadra but hasn't released anything."

—Salar News

DK Shivakumar PHOTO: PTI

BWSSB'S TAKE

There's no quick fix to water security

BENGALURU, 5 MAY

Fifteen years ago, a 72-year-old retired Reserve Bank of India employee, and a resident of Koramangala's National Games Village complex, bought a plot of land in Bengaluru rural.

Jannet Hilda said she fenced the land and is waiting for 'development' to catch up. Until a year ago, she wanted to resell it when the time was right. But when the water crisis hit Bengaluru this summer, she was glad she had access to "land". She decided to explore digging a borewell in the empty plot, just to make sure she had access to water.

"A friend told me to visit M Visvesvaraya RWH theme park in Jayanagar, where she said they guide people about rainwater harvesting (RWH) and digging wells," said Hilda.

It is while visiting the park that Hilda decided on an open well for the plot, with a recharge or seepage pit to collect rainwater.

The park, built by Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) promotes water conservation by putting up 26 models of RWH system. It also has five recharge wells to show the people how it was done in Bengaluru before the widespread digging of borewells.

Historically, it is said Bengaluru has been dependent on open wells for domestic use, which in turn were fed by shallow aquifers.

Recharge pits have been bandied about as a solution for depleting groundwater for some time now. Back in 2022, a webinar jointly organised by Biome Environmental Trust, BWSSB (Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board) and Citizen Matters, had highlighted the advantage of recharge wells, a relatively simple solution to recharge groundwater.

However, summer of 2024 did give a jolt to people, who finally realised how precarious the water situation can get.

Manohar said more people are convinced now. For instance, the board had proposed community rain harvesting, to ensure that the lakes and tanks are filled up.

—PTI

City has depended on open wells for domestic use PHOTO: ANI

Ex-leaders' kids spice up polls in Shivamogga

SHIVAMOGGA, 5 MAY

The contest between children of two former Chief Ministers and the presence of an expelled BJP leader in the fray has spiced up the poll scene in Karnataka's Shivamogga Lok Sabha constituency.

It is for the fifth consecutive time since 2009, including a bypoll in 2018, the segment is witnessing a straight fight between the families' two popular leaders and former chief ministers late S Bangarappa and BS Yediyurappa.

Known as the heartland of socialist movement in Karnataka, Shivamogga is a part of 'Malnad' region. BJP has renominate Yediyurappa's son BY Raghavendra.

Congress has named Bangarappa's daughter Geetha Shivarajkumar, who is the wife of Karnataka film star Shivarajkumar and daughter-in-law of Kannada thespian late Rajkumar.

Raghavendra has been elected to Parliament from this "Gateway to Malnad" three times. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and in the 2018 by-election, he defeated Geetha's brother Madhu Bangarappa, who is now a Minister in the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government. Madhu was then with JD(S).

Eshwarappa was expelled by the party for six years after he refused to bow out of the poll race. While Congress eyes electoral dividends over Eshwarappa's rebellion, BJP -- with Geetha's other brother and former Minister Kumar Bangarappa on its side - is hoping to bag a significant chunk of Ediga votes.

Shivamogga Lok Sabha segment has eight Assembly constituencies, out of which four are represented by BJP, Congress in three and JD(S) one. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Cong names Jay Narayan Patnaik as Puri candidate

BHUBANESWAR, 5 MAY

Congress on Saturday night named Jay Narayan Patnaik as its candidate for the Puri Lok Sabha seat in Odisha after Sucharita Mohanty pulled out of the race, claiming that the party denied her funds for her campaign.In a statement issued by Congress general secretary KC Venugopal, the party said its president Mallikarjun Kharge approved the candidature of Patnaik in place of Mohanty. Mohanty, the daughter of former Congress MP Brajamohan Mohanty, in a mail to Venugopal on Friday claimed that her campaign was hit hard because the party denied her funding and asked her to fight from her own resources. *—PTI*

Cong MLA joins BJP, 3rd crossover since March

BHOPAL, 5 MAY

Congress MLA from Madhya Pradesh's Bina assembly seat, Nirmala Sapre, joined the ruling BJP in the state on Sunday. She is the third MLA to switch over from the Congress to the BJP since the model code of conduct came into effect following the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls in March. Sapre joined the BJP in the presence of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during a public rally at Rahatgarh in Sagar district. Later, talking to reporters, Sapre said she had made several promises to the people of her constituency but was not able to fulfil them. The Congress is currently out of power, she pointed out and claimed the opposition party does not have any agenda of development. "I joined the stream of development under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Mohan Yadav," she said. *—PTI*

AICC Spokesperson Radhika resigns over 'injustice'

RAIPUR, 5 MAY

AICC spokesperson Radhika Khera on Sunday resigned from the party claiming that criticism over her visit to Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya led to the denial of justice to her in the incident that happened at Chhattisgarh Congress office. Khera also claimed she didn't get justice even after repeatedly informing all the top leaders of the party. Stating that those who support religion have always faced Opposition, Khera cited examples of mythological demons Hiranyakashyap, Ravan and Kansa to claim that some people oppose those who take the name of Lord Shri Ram in the same way. *—PTI*

Mehbooba served notice for 'using child'to seek votes

RAJOURI/JAMMU, 5 MAY

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti was on Sunday served a showcause notice, seeking an explanation for allegedly using a child to seek votes during campaigning for Lok Sabha polls in Rajouri district. Mehbooba, a former J&K chief minister, is among 20 candidates in the fray from the constituency. Additional District Magistrate, Rajouri and nodal officer for Model Code of Conduct, Rajeev Kumar Khajuria issued the notice to Mehbooba. "... a video has gone viral in which a minor female child is seen being used by you for political campaign/ appeal to the public to vote for you (PDP) on the day of election and the same child being encouraged and appreciated by you after the culmination of her appeal," Khajuria said. *—PTI*

Will never change Constitution: Rajnath

He accuses Cong of creating 'fear psychosis', spreading misinformation for 'vote bank'

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

BJP government will never change the Constitution or end reservation, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said, accusing the Congress of creating "fear psychosis" and resorting to spreading misinformation for "vote bank" politics.

Singh blasted Congress for spreading "canards" that BJP will change the Constitution if it returns to power and especially asserted that there was no question of changing the Preamble of the Constitution.

His assurance that the Preamble will not be changed addresses concerns among critics that the word 'secular' to describe India could be removed by the BJP.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been alleging that BJP will "tear up and throw away" the Constitution if it retains power. Some other Congress functionaries had expressed apprehensions that the BJP may drop the word "secularism" from the Preamble of the Constitution.

"Congress brought constitutional amendments 80 times. They changed the Preamble during the Emergency," the defence minister said.

"BJP will never change the Constitution. Constitution makers never imagined that there would be changes in the Preamble. You (Congress) only acted to hurt the core idea of the Constitution," he said.

"There is no question of changing the Preamble of the Constitution. They changed it and now they are making baseless allegations against us," Singh added.

Rajnath Singh said that campaigns should be based on facts *PHOTO: PTI*

The Preamble to the Constitution of India presents the principles of the Constitution The 42nd Amendment in 1976 changed the description of India from a "sovereign democratic republic" to a "sovereign, socialist secular democratic republic".

- On Friday, Rahul Gandhi alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modia is attacking India's democracy continuously and want to "destroy" the country's Constitution

"They (Congress) are trying to get peoples' support by instilling fear among the citizens," Singh said.

"I would suggest that they should try to get people's support by creating confidence and not by instilling fear. Electoral campaigns should be based on facts," he said.

On Friday, Rahul Gandhi alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP and RSS are attacking India's democracy continuously and want to "destroy" the country's Constitution.

" Congress is creating fear psychosis and resorting to spreading misinformation for vote bank politics," the senior BJP leader said. On the issue of reservation also, he alleged that the Congress is misleading the nation.

" Congress is trying to mislead people. There will not be any end to reservation. They are making false allegations against us," Singh said. *—PTI*

Didi: BJP used money to spread mistruth about Sandeshkhali

BOLPUR, 5 MAY

Alleging that the "mistruth" about Sandeshkhali was spread by the BJP using money, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday called upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi to stop "shedding crocodile tears" as the "conspiracy hatched by the saffron party" has come to the fore with the unravelling of a recent sting.

The TMC on Saturday released a video on social media, in which a man, who claimed to be a BJP mandal president in Sandeshkhali, was heard saying that Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, was behind the "whole conspiracy".

In the video, the man was heard saying that Adhikari had asked him and other BJP leaders of the area to "instigate three-four local women to level allegations of rape against three TMC leaders, including Shajahan Sheikh".

Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: PTI*

Addressing an election rally in Bolpur Lok Sabha seat, Banerjee said, "Blatant lies were invented by the BJP, which plotted a conspiracy by giving money to some people to tell lies."

"Did anyone ever imagine that BJP would stoop so low that it would spread canards on Sandeshkhali? Don't dishonour the mothers of West Bengal by leveling such heinous allegations. Don't dare try to disrespect women of the state by offering them money to level false allegations against our party," Banerjee said. Accusing Prime Minister Modi of taking the words of "few people" in his party on face value, she said that "by seeing the reaction of BJP leaders to the video, it was apparent that they were scared".

"However, if some people, including those from the TMC, committed any wrong, the party and the state government have always been quick to take disciplinary action against them," she asserted. *—PTI*

Gujarat minister targets Cong over Maulvi's arrest

AHMEDABAD, 5 MAY

Gujarat minister Harsh Sanghavi on Sunday targeted the Congress over the arrest of a maulvi a day earlier for allegedly planning to kill a Hindu leader and threaten a BJP MLA on orders of his handlers in Pakistan and Nepal and said the opposition party must not "inspire" such persons.

The comment from the minister of state for home in the BJP government here evoked a sharp response from the Congress, which said the ruling party was trying to hide its own incompetence in controlling crimes.

Surat police on Saturday arrested maulvi Sohel Abubakr Timol, 27, for allegedly planning to murder the leader of a Hindu organisation in Surat and threatening the chief editor of Sudarshan TV, former BJP spokesperson Nupur Sharma and Telangana MLA Raja Singh in connivance with handlers from Pakistan and Nepal.

Harsh Sanghavi *PHOTO: X/ HARSH SANGHAVI*

"The maulvi was hatching a big plan to murder BJP and Hindu leaders. The chat messages and Rs 1 crore supari (for the purpose) offered by his masters sitting in Pakistan has been exposed. The way the maulvi was instigating youth and children for anti-national activities stands exposed," Sanghavi told a Gujarat news channel.

"I want to tell Congress that you will get many political opportunities but it is a sin to save maulvis like him. The Congress should stop making indirect efforts in this direction," he added. *—PTI*

WILL OPPOSE CAA, SAYS ASSAM NDA ALLY AGP

DEOHATI, 5 MAY

Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), which is a part of the ruling NDA, asserted that it still opposes the CAA and will continue to pursue the case it has filed against the contentious law in the Supreme Court.

After the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was passed in Parliament, AGP had in December 2019 challenged the law in the apex court and demanded that the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam be excluded from the purview of the legislation. Veteran AGP leader and candidate for Barpeta Lok Sabha seat, Phani Bhusan Choudhury said the party still opposes the Act and will continue to raise its voice in every platform.

"The AGP is clear in its stand... it opposes the CAA. We are, in fact, fighting a case in the Supreme Court against the law," he said, when asked about the party's position after the rules of Act were notified days before the Lok Sabha elections were announced. Choudhury claimed the regional party has never diluted its stand on the issue."BJP is a national party and AGP a regional outfit. Their aims and objectives are different from ours. It will not happen that we will support the CAA because we are with the BJP. That's why our party decided to approach the Supreme Court against the CAA and fight a case, which is still on," he added *—PTI*

Will pass Rohit Vemula Act if voted to power: Congress

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Congress on Sunday said there were many discrepancies in the investigation conducted previously into Rohith Vemula's death in 2016 and asserted that its government in Telangana will leave no stone unturned to ensure justice for his family.

Police in Telangana have filed a closure report before a court in its probe into the death of Rohith Vemula, a student of the University of Hyderabad, claiming he was not a Dalit and died by suicide in 2016 as he feared that his "real caste" would be discovered. Congress general secretary, organisation, KC Venugopal, said Rohith Vemula's death was a grave atrocity that completely exposed the "anti-Dalit mindset" of the BJP.

"When we form a government at the Centre, we will pass a Rohith Vemula Act, specifically addressing the issue of caste and communal atrocities on campuses to ensure no student coming from socio-economic backwardness has to face the same plight as Rohith ever again," Venugopal said.

Venugopal's remarks came a day after Rohith Vemula's mother Radhika Vemula met Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy in Hyderabad and urged him to see to it that "justice" is done to the family. *—PTI*

OMAR ABDULLAH ATTACKS BJP, SAYS 'MUSLIMS ARE TARGETED'

SRINAGAR, 5 MAY

National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah attacked the BJP on Sunday, alleging Muslims are being targeted and insulted by the party which has introduced new laws to "weaken" the country's minority community.

The former chief minister said the people of Jammu and Kashmir are going through a very difficult time as "our lips are sealed, our voices are not heard and our government offices are filled with outsiders". Addressing a gathering at Hawal in downtown Srinagar, Abdullah's first rally these elections, he alleged Muslims are being targeted and insulted by the BJP which has introduced new laws to "weaken" the country's minority. *—PTI*

WAR OF WORDS

Shah: BJP will ensure reservations for SC, ST

PM AGAINST RESERVATION, SAYS RAHUL

HYDERABAD, 5 MAY

Mounting his attack on BJP, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was against reservations and wanted to take away quotas from the people.

Addressing an election rally at Nirmal under Adilabad (ST) Lok Sabha constituency in Telangana, he claimed that the ongoing general elections is taking place between two ideologies in which Congress is trying to safeguard the Constitution, while BJP-RSS combine wants to end it and people's rights.

"Narendra Modi ji is against reservation. He wants to take away reservations from you. The biggest issue before the country is increasing reservation from 50 per cent," he added.

Congress has in its manifesto promised that if the party forms the government at the Centre, it will breach the 50 per cent limit and increase the quotas beyond 50 per cent, he said.

Alleging that Modi privatised the public sector, Gandhi said the contract system implemented by the BJP-led government amounts to removing reservations. *—PTI*

Amit Shah exuded confidence that BJP would win more than 10 seats in Telangana out of the total 17 *PHOTO: PTI*

HYDERABAD, 5 MAY

Reservations for SC, ST, OBCs would not end as long as there is even one BJP MP in Parliament, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday.

Addressing an election rally at Kagaznagar in Telangana, Shah alleged that Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy also forwarded a doctored video of the top BJP leader.

This is a reference to the case over a 'doctored' video of Shah being circulated on social media.

Shah exuded confidence that the BJP would win more than ten seats in Telangana out of the total 17.

The senior BJP leader alleged that AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi did not attend the Ram Temple consecration despite being invited for fear of their vote-bank.

He said the vote-bank of Congress and AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi is the same.

slammed the Congress and the Bharat Rashtra Samithi formerly known as Telangana Rashtra Samithi and said that both the parties are afraid of AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi.

While addressing a public meeting in Adilabad, Shah said, "Can TRS save Telangana from Razakars? No. Both Congress and TRS are afraid of Owaisi. The 'ABC' of appeasement in Telangana means A for Asaduddin Owaisi, B for BRS, and C for Congress. The Congress party which is afraid of Owaisi cannot work for the welfare of Telangana."

The Home Minister said that, unlike the Congress, the BJP has a vision, accomplishments, and will.

He further promised the people of Telangana that once the BJP is voted to power, the party will end the reservation given to Muslims and will instead give reservation benefits to Dalits and Adivasis in the state. *—PTI/ANI*

35 Muslim candidates in Guj; Cong fields none

AHMEDABAD, 5 MAY

Thirty-five Muslim candidates are contesting the Lok Sabha polls in Gujarat but Congress has this time broken its tradition and not fielded a single person from the community in the state.

Congress has argued that Bharuch Lok Sabha seat, from where it used to traditionally field a Muslim candidate, has this time gone to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as part of the seat sharing agreement among the Opposition INDIA bloc constituents. Among national parties, only Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has fielded a Muslim candidate from Gandhinagar for 7 May polls in the state.

Most of the candidates from the community are either contesting independently or have been fielded by lesser-known parties.

Gujarat Congress's minority department chairman Vajirkhan Pathan told PTI, "The party has traditionally fielded at least one candidate from the Muslim community in the Lok Sabha elections in the state, especially from Bharuch. This time it was not possible as the seat went to AAP." Congress had offered to field a candidate from one seat in Gujarat, but the community members declined given a slim chance of victory, he claimed.

Apart from Bharuch, the Congress has in the past fielded Muslim candidates from Navsari and Ahmedabad (when it was not divided into Ahmedabad East and West seats). *—PTI*

CHANGING SCENARIO

Dacoits gone, but caste thrives in Chambal

CHAMBAL, 5 MAY

Madhya Pradesh's Chambal region, once the staple for Bollywood's dacoit and gunslinger dramas, is also a massive caste cauldron where change is seeping in due to modernisation, say a section of people.

The Gwalior-Chambal region, which borders Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and has three seats, namely Gwalior, Morena and Bhind, which is reserved for Scheduled Castes. A part of the Chambal region is in Shivpuri district and falls under Guna Lok Sabha seat.

Gwalior, Morena and Bhind (SC) Lok Sabha seats are dominated by Other Backward Classes with a sizable population of SCs.

Over the last two decades, the Dalits and backwards have become assertive and are playing a dominant role in politics *PHOTO: PTI*

Bhuvnesh Singh Tomar, a professor at Centre for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication in Gwalior's Jiwaji University, told PTI that caste sentiments were rooted even when the Gwalior-Chambal region was infested with bandits, dacoits or "baghis" (rebels) as these outlaws loved to call themselves.

"Casteism in politics is not new. It always existed in the Chambal region, except on occasions when towering leaders, like those from the Scindia family, contested. But a lot of social changes have taken place in the past three decades due to increased road connectivity and modernisation," Tomar said. Over the last two decades, the Dalits and backwards have become assertive and are playing a dominant role in politics, he said.

"The last two Lok Sabha elections in this area were held around the narrative set by the BJP. BJP candidates were looking weak earlier as the party fielded leaders from Gwalior and Morena, who lost polls earlier," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Poonch: People questioned, search on for terrorist

MENDHAR/JAMMU, 5 MAY

Several people were detained for questioning on Sunday as a massive search operation for terrorists behind the Indian Air Force (IAF) convoy attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district entered the second day, officials said. Additional Director General of Police, Jammu, Anand Jain and senior officers of the Army and intelligence agencies visited the ambush spot in the Surankote area. The Army also conducted aerial surveillance using a helicopter, they said.Five IAF personnel were injured in the attack on Saturday evening near Shahsitar and one of them later succumbed to injuries at a military hospital. The officials said a well-coordinated joint operation by the Army and the police was underway in many areas to neutralise the terrorists.—*PTI*

11 Bangladeshi nationals arrested in Tripura

AGARTALA, 5 MAY

As many as eleven Bangladeshi nationals including four children were arrested from a remote border village in Tripura's Dhalai district for entering the country without valid documents, police said on Sunday. The Bangladeshi nationals were on their way home (Bangladesh) through Gandacherra sub-division of Dhalai district. Acting on a tip-off, a police team headed by Officer in Charge (OC), Gandacherra police station, Palah Dutta carried out a raid at Machkumir, a border village of Dhalai district on Saturday and arrested the 11 Bangladeshi nationals, they said. The OC said, they had gone to Bengaluru after crossing the border in the Gandacherra area around a month back.—*PTI*

Teen kills brother for stopping her from talking to boys

RAJNANDGAON, 5 MAY

A 14-year-old girl allegedly hacked her elder brother to death with an axe after he scolded her for talking to boys on mobile phone in Chhattisgarh's Khairagarh-Chhuikhadan-Gandai district, police said.The teenager has been detained for the offence that took place at Amlidihkala village under Chhuikhadan police station limits on Friday, the police said in a statement on Saturday. The girl told the police that she and her brother,18, were at home at the time of the incident while the other family members had gone out for work. Angry over the rebuke, the girl allegedly hit her brother on his throat with an axe when he had fallen asleep. Her brother died on the spot, police said.—*PTI*

Principal, teacher booked for hurting religious sentiments

BALLIA, 5 MAY

An FIR has been registered against the principal and a teacher of a private school run by Christian missionaries in Ballia district for allegedly hurting religious sentiments, police said on Sunday.The FIR was registered at the Rasda police station on Saturday on a complaint from a student's father, they said. In his complaint, he has alleged that his son's "shikha" was cut by his teacher with a pair of scissors on 2 May, police said. The "shikha" is a tuff of hair kept at the back of the head by a Hindu following tonsure.The case has been registered against the principal and the teacher under sections 295A (malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings), 504 (intentional insulting a person) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, Deputy Superintendent of Police Mohammad Fahim Qureshi said. —*PTI*

India strict about pesticide residues in food: Govt

This comes as MDH and Everest spices are banned abroad

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The government on Sunday asserted that India has one of the most stringent norms for pesticides residues in food items and rejected reports suggesting that food regulator FSSAI allows high level of residues in spices and herbs.

The clarification comes amid a ban imposed by the Hong Kong food regulator on certain spice mix of two leading Indian brands MDH and Everest on alleged presence of pesticide Ethylene Oxide in their samples. The Singapore food regulator too ordered a recall of one spice product of the Everest brand.

FSSAI is currently collecting samples of branded spices, including that of MDH and Everest, sold in the domestic markets to ensure they comply with its quality norms. It does not regulate the quality of exported spices.

In a statement, the Union Health Ministry clarified that maximum residue limits are different for various food products based on risk assessment.

FSSAI is currently collecting samples of branded spices sold in the markets to ensure they comply with its quality norms PHOTO: PIXABAY

Explaining the process of fixing pesticides residue limits, the health ministry said that the FSSAI's scientific panel on pesticides residues examines the data received through Central Insecticide Board and Registration Committee (CIB & RC) and recommends the MRLs after performing risk assessment.

The dietary consumption of the Indian population and health concerns in respect of all age groups are taken into account.

"Total pesticides registered by CIB & RC in India are more than 295, out of which 139 pesticides are registered for use in spices," the ministry said.

Codex has adopted a total 243 pesticides, out of which 75 pesticides are applicable for spices.

The ministry further said that a pesticide is registered on many food commodities with different MRLs based on risk assessment data.

For instance, the use of Monocrotophos is allowed on many crops with different MRLs such as rice at 0.03 mg/kg, citrus fruits at 0.2 mg/kg, coffee beans at 0.1 mg/kg and cardamom 0.5 mg/kg, Chilli at 0.2 mg/kg.

"The MRL of 0.01 mg/kg was applicable in case of pesticides for which MRLs have not been fixed.

"This limit was increased to 0.1 mg/kg only in cases of spices and is applicable only for those pesticides which are not registered in India by CIB & RC," the statement said.

—*PTI*

COW VIGILANTE IN SOUP

180 booked for inciting riots in Uttar Pradesh

SHAHJAHANPUR, 5 MAY

A First Information Report (FIR) has been lodged against 187 people, including the state general secretary of Rashtriya Gau Rakshak Sangh, for allegedly trying to incite riots and engage in criminal conspiracy here, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on Wednesday when Sultan Mohammad's bike allegedly hit a pedestrian in the Shri Ram Chandra Mission area on the Lucknow-Delhi National Highway on the Hardoi bypass road, Circle Officer (City) Saumya Pandey said, adding this led to an argument between the two parties.

State General Secretary of the Rashtriya Gau Rakshak Sangh, Rajesh Awasthi, and a large number of his supporters allegedly tried to give the incident a communal colour and demonstrated by blocking the highway, CO Pandey said.

The protesters also raised slogans against the police, she said.

An FIR was registered on Saturday evening against 17 named, including Awasthi, and 170 unidentified peroples by the Ram Chandra Mission police station in-charge Chandra Prakash Shukla, CO Pandey said.

The FIR was lodged under sections 153 (provocation with intent to cause riot), 120B (conspiracy), 147 (rioting), 341 (wrongful restraint), 188 (violating prohibitory orders), 353 (obstructing government functionaries), 435 (causing hurt by explosive substance) and 504 (intentional insult with intent to breach the peace) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Police said efforts are underway to nab the accused.

—*PTI*

ROAD RAGE

KRSTC bus driver moves court over spat; Mayor, husband booked

T'PURAM, 5 MAY

A case has been registered against Mayor Arya Rajendran, her husband and four others in connection with a recent road rage incident here.

The Cantonment police registered a case on Saturday night based on a complaint lodged by Baiju Noel, a lawyer who had earlier approached a local court in this regard.

According to the FIR, the case was registered against Arya Rajendran, CPI (M) MLA Sachin Dev and three other people for blocking a KSRTC bus on the road, creating traffic snarl and causing inconvenience to the public.

They were booked under Sections 141 (unlawful assembly), 268 (public nuisance), 283 (causing obstruction in a public way), 341 (wrongful restraint) of the Indian Penal Code and and Section 201 (causing impediment to the free flow of traffic) of the Motor Vehicle Act.

Mayor Arya Rajendran and Sachin Dev PHOTO: FACEBOOK

The police action comes amidst reports that HL Yadhu, the driver of the KSRTC bus against whom Rajendran had filed a misbehaviour complaint, moved the court seeking action against the Mayor, MLA and the others involved in the road rage incident a week ago.

The mayor and her family had on 27 April night got into a heated argument with the KSRTC bus driver after blocking the vehicle at Palayam junction. The mayor alleged that the driver made sexually suggestive gestures at them

She claimed that the driver was rash and negligent, and they intervened after the bus was about to hit their car from behind.

Police had arrested the driver based on the mayor's complaint that he misbehaved with her. Later, he was released as the case was registered as a bailable offence.

—*PTI*

Parents should pay for ACs in school: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

- The court observed that the Directorate of Education was also seized of the issue after it received complaints

The cost of air conditioning in school has to be borne by the parents as it is a facility being provided to the students, which is no different from the other charges such as laboratory fee, the Delhi High Court has said.

A bench headed by Acting Chief Justice Manmohan dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) against a private school charging Rs 2,000 per month for the air conditioning in classes and stated that such financial burden cannot be fastened on the school management alone and parents should be mindful of the facilities and their cost while selecting a school.

The petitioner, whose ward studied in class 9 in the private school, argued that the obligation to provide air conditioning facilities to the students rests with the management and it should be provided by them from their own funds and resources.

The court opined that prima facie there is no irregularity in the charge levied by the school.

"The financial burden of providing such facilities cannot be fastened on the school management alone," the bench, also comprising Justice Manmeet PS Arora, said in an order passed on2 May.

The court observed that the Directorate of Education was also seized of the issue after it received complaints and the petition was not maintainable. —*PTI*

6 OF FAMILY KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT

THANE, 30 MARCH

Six members of a family were killed and two others injured after their car was hit by a truck in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur district on Sunday, police said.

The accident occurred on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway near the Banas river bridge.

The family was on its way to offer prayers at a Ganesh temple in Sawai Madhopur, police said.

Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, deputy CM Diya Kumari and RLP leader Hanuman Beniwal have expressed grief over the incident.

"Six members of a family were killed on the spot while two children were injured. They have been referred to Jaipur and reportedly stable," Additional SP Dinesh Kumar said.

He said that a family which hailed from Khandela in Sikar district was on the way to offer prayers at Ganesh Temple in Sawai Madhopur.

—*PTI*

Ghazipur fire: NGT seeks response from CPCD, MCD

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The National Green Tribunal has sought a response within five weeks from authorities, including the Central Pollution Control Board and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, on the fire incident at the Ghazipur landfill site last month.

The tribunal was hearing the matter after taking suo motu cognisance of a newspaper report regarding the massive fire at the landfill in East Delhi on 21 April.

A bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and Expert Member A Senthil Vel said the news report raised a "substantial issue" relating to compliance with environmental norms.It said a similar blaze had occurred at the site in 2022 and the tribunal in January of the next year levied an environmental compensation of Rs 900 crore on the Delhi government, besides issuing directions for taking remedial measures.The bench had last year observed that the Delhi government and its authorities did not follow even minimum standards to prevent fires. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- The tribunal was hearing the matter after taking suo motu cognisance of a report regarding fire at landfil

CISCE 10, 12 RESULTS TO BE OUT ON MONDAY

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The Council for Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) will announce Class 10 and 12 board exam results on Monday, officials said.

"The ICSE (Class 10) and ICS (Class 12) will be announced on May 6 at 11 am," board's Chief Executive and Secretary Joseph Emmanuel said on Sunday.

The results will be available on the board's website, the CAREERS portal and DigiLocker.The board has also decided to discontinue compartment exams for Classes 10 and 12 from this session."Candidates who wish to improve their marks or grades in the same year of examination may take improvement exams in a maximum of two subjects," Emmanuel added. —*PTI*

Tractor used for illegal mining kills MP cop

SHAHDOL, 5 MAY

An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) has been crushed to death by a tractor-trolley used for transporting illegally mined sand in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol district, a police official said on Sunday.

Two people have been arrested in connection with the incident which took place on the intervening night of Saturday-Sunday in Badoli village under Beohari police station limits, 90km from the district headquarters, Superintendent of Police Kumar Prateek told PTI.

ASI Mahendra Bagri, posted at the Beohari police station, was going along with two colleagues to arrest a person in some case.

On the way, they saw a sand-laden tractor-trolley coming towards their direction and tried to stop it, the official said.

Bagri and the other policemen gave a signal to the driver to stop the tractor carrying the illegally mined sand. But he did not stop and the vehicle ran over the ASI, the police official said.

Two people have been arrested in connection with the incident, which took place on the intervening night of Saturday PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

After the incident, the driver jumped from the tractor and ran away. The speeding vehicle went out of control, collided with a culvert and overturned, Prateek said.Driver Raj Rawat and Ashutosh Singh, who was piloting the vehicle, were later arrested. The vehicle owner, Surendra Singh, is absconding, he said.

A case was registered against the accused on charges of murder and illegal sand mining under provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Mines Act, the official said.

Additional Director General of Police, Shahdol zone, DC Sagar told reporters that a reward of Rs 30,000 has been announced for anyone providing information that would help the police to arrest Surendra Singh. —*PTI*

WATER GUSHES INTO HOMES

Kerala's coasts witness sea incursion

T'PURAM, 5 MAY

Amidst warning of 'Kallakkadal' phenomenon in coastal areas of the state, several places in Kerala have been witnessing high tidal waves and intense sea incursion since Saturday night.

"Kallakkadal' is a phenomenon of sudden sea swells causing rough waves in coastal areas.

A number of houses were damaged and roads were flooded as massive waves hit the shores in many coastal hamlets.

Sea water gushed into houses forcing residents to shift to safer places in Anchuthengu and Poonthura areas of Thiruvananthapuram.

In several places, local people had to pay extra vigil to protect their fishing equipment, kept on the shores, from the high tidal waves.

"Kallakkadal' is a phenomenon of sudden sea swells causing rough waves in coastal areas PHOTO: PIXABAY

Besides Anchuthengu, Poonthura and Muthalapozhi hamlets in Thiruvananthapuram, sea incursion was reported in Mundakkal and Alappadu areas in Kollam district, Purakkad in Alappuzha and Kodungallur and Perinjanam in Thrissur district and so on, local people said.

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) on Saturday withdrew a 'red alert' issued for 'Kallakkadal' in coastal areas of Kerala and the south Tamil Nadu coast and revised it to an 'orange alert'.

The agency warned that low-lying areas of the Kerala coast were likely to experience rough seas and sea surge due to extremely strong waves of 0.5 metres to 1.5 metres till 11.30 pm on Sunday as part of the phenomenon.

INCOIS, the Central agency that issues weather warnings for fishermen in the country, advised people to safely moor their fishing vessels in the harbour.

Authorities advised people to continue their caution and avoid trips to the beach and completely stay away from activities at sea. INCOIS has earlier said that the swells result from strong winds in the southern part of the Indian Ocean at certain times, and that they occur suddenly without any particular indications or warning which is why it is named 'Kallakkadal.' —*PTI*

Salman firing: Family of accused who died moves HC

MUMBAI, 5 MAY

The family of Anuj Thapan, who died while in police custody following his arrest in the case related to firing outside Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's house here, has moved the Bombay High Court seeking a CBI probe into his death.

While the police claim Thapan killed himself in the lock-up, his mother Rita Devi in her petition filed in the High Court on Friday alleged foul play and claimed he was killed.

In the plea, which will come up for hearing in due course, Devi sought the High Court to direct the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe the death of her son.

The petition alleged Thapan was physically assaulted and tortured by police in custody.

It also sought the High Court to direct the police to hand over CCTV footage of the police station and the lock-up where Thapan was held.

PHOTO: PTI

The petitioner requested for the preservation of call data records (CDR) of police officials, who are probing the firing incident, from 24 April to 2 May.

It also sought directions for a fresh post-mortem in Thapan's death.

Thapan, accused of supplying firearms and bullets for the firing incident, was arrested on 26 April from Punjab along with Sonu Bishnoi and was remanded to police custody till 30 April. —*PTI*

'SAREE GOES GLOBAL'

Members of the Indian-American community with others during 'Saree Goes Global' event at Times Square, in New York. It is committed to raising awareness about the saree while supporting the handloom artisans in India through global events
PHOTO: PTI

Youngsters take up arms to 'protect' villages in Manipur

Every day in shifts, morning and night, a group of armed youngsters patrol roads around Manipur's Koutruk village. Their objective: Keep residents safe from the warring factions of Meitei and Kuki, two communities that have been in conflict since last year.

These youngsters, mostly in their late 20s and early 30s, identify themselves as volunteers and say they have taken up the responsibility to keep their own safe as security forces "could not do enough to protect us".

Kotruk in the Imphal Valley is one of the many villages in the state that is "protected" by such groups which identify themselves as "Village Volunteers", "Village Volunteer Force", "Village Defence Force" and "Village Protection Force".

These groups, officials say, are not associated with any security agency or the armed forces.

Trained in basic combat tactics, the village forces have vowed to keep their areas safe from the ethnic violence that has left many dead, injured and displaced.

Their presence in villages in the valley and Churachandpur in the hills cannot be missed. They are in uniform and can be spotted manning bunkers made of sandbags or patrolling with weapons, including sticks, batons and rifles -- some country-made, and some stolen or smuggled.

Patrolling duties are assigned through a roster system. Each shift is between six and seven hours with small groups of five to six sent out to keep a watch on highways, village roads and narrow pathways that pass through hills and dense forests.

"Clearly our (security) forces could not do enough to protect us. Now, we know that they cannot be trusted with the task of ensuring our safety. So, we had to do it ourself and we decided to take up the task according to our calibre and capacity...we were forced to take matters into our own hands," a village volunteer told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

A 'village volunteer' stands guard at a bunker set up in conflict-hit Manipur ***PHOTO: PTI***

Though patrolling is effective, drones allowed teams to keep a vigil on a wider area, he said.

"Earlier, we were operating drones to keep a vigil but now jammers have been installed by the central forces and, so, we cannot assess the situation that way," the volunteer said.

This PTI reporter visited a camp of these volunteers, most of whom earned their living from farming. There are also those who have left their jobs or studies for the security of their villages. They showed this reporter the bullet holes on walls of houses and the measures in place to thwart threats.

As some volunteers prepared for the morning patrol, others, including women from displaced families that now reside in relief camps, attend to daily tasks, including cooking meals.

Recalling an incident of violence, another volunteer said, "We were having dinner when bullets started raining from above (hills)... we could hear it but we thought we are safe inside. But a bullet pierced through our wall...luckily my father escaped it."

On their training, another village volunteer said, "It varied from 20 days to up to two months, including training in basic NCC skills. Some training in country-made weapons too". He refused to comment on who trained them.

Local officials maintain caution, allowing their activities as long as they "remain peaceful".

"We do recognise their presence...we do not object unless they come with weapons in front of security forces or government officials because then we are bound to ask for a (firearm) licence and take action under the Arms Act. As long as they are guarding peacefully, we do not interfere," an official said requesting anonymity.

Areas in the hills and the valley have been marked following the ethnic violence -- some local describe it as "new borders". And, keeping a vigil on these borders are these volunteers, who screen passing vehicles and occasionally frisk people to prevent "unwanted intrusions".

Kukis and Meities cannot travel between the hills and the valley.

Others such as Nagas and Muslims can move between the regions provided they pass certain checks. They are given an escort from the border checkpoints.

This PTI reporter, who travelled to Churachandpur earlier this month, was stopped at four of these checkpoints. She was asked many questions, including where she was going, whom she was meeting and whether the person she was meeting was a government official or a civil society group leader.

"We stop every vehicle and ask for their ID. We maintain a register of who is visiting and for what purpose. We keep a vigil to ensure that no Meiti gets to enter the hills. Meitie volunteers do the same," a volunteer said.

The region remains on the edge with even a small incident such as sporadic clashes between volunteer groups capable of tipping it over. More so as security agencies are yet to recover all the firearms looted during the violence last year that left 200 dead and displaced 60,000 people. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Election spending set to ignite rural demand, feel experts

Even as the 2024 Lok Sabha polls have started to unfold, anticipation remained high not only in the political landscape but also about the ripple effects on the economy, particularly in rural India, as experts described the elections as the most expensive one ever fought in the country's history.

With an expenditure of a staggering Rs 1.35 lakh crore estimated by N Bhaskara Rao, who chairs the Centre for Media Studies and has been tracking election spending for 35 years, significant parts of the amount spent during the polls will reach the pockets of India's rural population boosting sales, business houses feel.

According to a study, about 35 per cent of election expenditure in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in India was made on campaigns and publicity. The second highest expenditure head was payments to voters via various means – hiring workers, purchasing campaign materials, freebies and direct cash transfers in some cases.

Industry leaders expect these will have a positive impact on the economy, especially in India's countryside.

"The considerable election expenditure anticipated over the next two to three months would ignite a notable increase in rural spending. Propelled by optimism and economic activity stemming from political campaigns, this surge in rural demand will be fortified," Keshav Bhajanka, Executive Director of India's top plyboard maker, Century Plyboard, told PTI.

He said his company aims to leverage this opportunity by monitoring rural market dynamics and adapting its product offerings and marketing strategies to align with the evolving preferences and needs of rural consumers.

"The company also plans to intensify its efforts to expand its distribution network and enhance brand visibility in rural areas to capture a larger share of the anticipated post-election market growth," Bhajanka said.

Shreeram Bagla, Managing Director of city-based snacks major Annapurna Swadisht, highlighted that rural demand for the FMCG sector as a whole had been slightly subdued during the second and third quarters of the 2023-24 fiscal.

"Emami Ltd, another FMCG major with considerable rural dependence, also expressed a positive outlook.

"We expect the economy to bounce back on multiple counts in the backdrop of the election. First, anticipation of a good monsoon is expected to boost the rural economy. Secondly, with the softening of raw material prices, while companies are gearing up to pass on the benefits to the consumers, they will also invest more in brand building. The combination of these will definitely push the demand for the FMCG sector up," Emami Wholetime Director & Vice Chairman, Mohan Goenka, told PTI.

Amnish Aggarwal, head of Institutional Research at Prabhudas Lilladher, while offering a nuanced perspective, pointed out that in present circumstances election spending may not be boosting rural demand in the manner it did before.

Reflecting on the trends observed in past elections, Aggarwal underscored that the correlation between poll expenditure translating into a surge in rural demand is over-hyped in current times due to cash movement restrictions which are imposed with the model code of conduct.

"This direct correlation was perhaps true a decade or more ago. Factors like the anticipation of a good monsoon and inflation play pivotal roles in shaping consumer behaviour in current times compared to cash flow during polls," he said.

Political parties, though, acknowledged that demand for vehicles goes up during poll seasons, whether sourced from rentals or new purchases for use in election activities. Automobile sales in March this year were up by 10 per cent over last year, totalling 3.7 lakh vehicles.

However, a senior official of a major car company said that on account of model code of conduct-related restrictions, overall sales of both passenger and commercial vehicles were subdued in April.

Grassroots-level workers of political parties said that there has been a high purchase of snacks and beverages and certain FMCG items required for workers. FMCG products are also used as freebies for audiences brought to political rallies, they said.

A shopkeeper in Hooghly district stated, "Local political leaders become more generous during election times, and we sell more."

West Bengal's Chief Electoral Officer confirmed that since the commencement of MCC, freebies worth Rs 57.67 crore have been seized from the state. *—PTI*

Significant parts of the amount spent during the polls will reach the pockets of India's rural population boosting sales, business houses feel ***PHOTO: ANI***

Social media influencers are driving 2024 Lok Sabha polls

Just weeks before the first ballot was cast in this year's election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was at an event in Delhi rubbing shoulders with people known by names like BeerBiceps and Curly Tales.

The event - an awards show, congratulating some of the country's top social media stars on their work - was an acknowledgement of the power of the influencer which a few years ago may have seemed unimaginable.

And as politicians prepared to battle it out for India's billion votes, these influencers were being lined up to play a crucial role in reaching the young, the disinterested and the disillusioned.

But even as some celebrate social media's democratisation of the media - a place where anyone can share their views freely - others paint a darker picture, one where threats are rife, and the truth can be set aside for the right pay cheque.

A decade ago, you would have struggled to find anyone calling themselves an "influencer".

But now, says Vinay Deshpande, co-founder of Rajneethi, a political management consultant firm, "it's become a profession".

Pocket money underplays the earning potential somewhat, however. At the lower end, people can charge around Rs 2,000 ($24; £19) a day, but top influencers can pull in about Rs 500,000 for a post - equivalent to the monthly salary of someone in top-level management.

The creator of the Ranting Gola channel revealed that political parties and election management firms have offered as much as "100,000 to 500,000 rupees for a single campaign".

It is no small amount - but then, it could turn the tide in a candidate's favour.

Deshpande says they have helped an Opposition candidate win an assembly election by pushing out content through a curated list of local influencers with a small but active following.

"Social media content is powerful and can influence the way a person feels about an issue," Deshpande says. "It gives social currency to a belief or opinion - but this can lead to a lack of critical thinking about an issue," he adds.

Preethi Aggarwal, 25, is one of those who turns to apps like Instagram, YouTube and Twitter to help her understand the news.

Like thousands of others, Aggarwal follows a bunch of "political influencers", or people who talk about politics on social media to "really understand what's going on".

"News can get boring and complicated sometimes. I think these people [influencers] make it fun and easier to understand," she says, adding the context and their own perspective help her form her opinions.

But the problem is, whose perspective is she getting?

YouTuber Samdish Bhatia reveals numerous politicians have reached out to him, especially in the months before this election, offering him millions of rupees to interview them.

Influencers like Ranting Gola (left) and Sham Sharma are using their social media presence to promote political parties ***PHOTO: BBC***

"But they wanted me to share questions in advance or get the video approved before it's published," he says, adding that he declined the offers because he "likes to maintain editorial control".

The particular trend for longer form, slightly chummy interviews - where politicians get to show off their human side - is particularly vulnerable to management, says Joyojeet Pal, an associate professor at the University of Michigan.

"Many of these interviews are carefully managed by politicians," Pal says.

But for Pal, this is just one of the problems he sees with politics on social media.

In a recent research paper, he examined some of India's top influencers and who they interviewed, finding BJP leaders were featured more often than Opposition leaders.

His research also found an overall drop in the number of accounts posting content critical of the incumbent government in recent years, while the amount of pro-BJP content had increased.

Influencers supporting the opposition certainly suggested they were working in a hostile environment.

A number who post content that's critical of the government declined to speak for this piece citing fear of repercussions by the government. They also run their channels under pseudonyms to keep their identities secret.

The Ranting Gola said that she has often received comments that are abusive or threatening because of the videos she posts and that her Instagram account has been disabled numerous times, even though the platform hasn't given her a clear reason for doing so.

She also only spoke on the condition that her name not be revealed BJP government has denied allegations that it has clamped down on dissent and free speech.

But even pro-BJP YouTuber Sham Sharma said that freedom of speech could be a problem in India:

But even given these concerns, opposition parties are using the same influencer system to reach voters in what they say is a difficult environment.

"Our funds have been frozen; we have no money to advertise," she adds, referring to action taken by India's tax department weeks before the elections. Congress leaders have accused the government of political vendetta, but the government has denied the allegation and said that the federal department was doing its job independently.

Influencers, Srinate argues, are a good way to reach voters as a result of these alleged hurdles, explaining the Congress has been working with "volunteers" who believe in the party's ideology and want to share its work on social media.

Ankit Lal, former political advisor of the Opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), agrees that influencers have helped democratise the publicity landscape.

Akash Banerjee, a former journalist who runs the YouTube channel, The DeshBhakt, argues that influencers are also able to push boundaries more than the traditional media can.

He cites the video 'Is India becoming a dictatorship?' - made by popular content creator Dhruv Rathee, who is based in Germany - which takes on the government directly, and has been viewed about 24 million times on YouTube so far. The government hasn't reacted to the video yet.

"After the video, the term 'dictatorship' has popped up more in conversations, and this is something that has never happened before."

"Our job as influencers may not be to open the window and check if it's raining, but we owe it to the nation to take a look outside the window and let people know if dark clouds are approaching and that they can do something by voting." *—PTI*

Driver dies after crashing into White House gate

WASHINGTON, 5 MAY

A driver died after a vehicle crashed into a gate at the White House Saturday night, but the fatal collision is being investigated "only as a traffic crash" and there was no threat to the president's residence, law enforcement authorities said. The male driver, who was not immediately identified, was found dead in the vehicle following the crash shortly before 10:30 p.m. at an outer perimeter gate of the White House complex, the US Secret Service said in a statement. The Washington Metropolitan Police Department said the vehicle crashed into a security barrier at the intersection of 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. "At this time, the incident is being investigated only as a traffic crash by MPD's Major Crash Investigations Unit," the metro police said. *—AP*

PHOTO: EPA

Panama to choose Prez after front runner sentenced

PANAMA CITY, 5 MAY

Panamanians are voting in a general election which has been overshadowed by the disqualification of the man who was leading in the polls. Ex-president Ricardo Martinelli was the favourite to win until he was banned from running after being found guilty of money laundering. His replacement on the ballot, José Raúl Mulino, is leading in the polls. Whoever wins most the votes in this round will be declared president and sworn in on 1 July. There are a total of eight candidates competing for the presidency, and voters will also choose members of Panama's national assembly. As presidents cannot serve two consecutive terms, the incumbent, Laurentino "Nito" Cortizo, will not stand for re-election. Opinion polls put Mulino in the lead. *—BBC NEWS*

Taiwan detects 7 Chinese aircraft, 5 naval vessels

TAIPEI, 5 MAY

Taiwan's Ministry of Defence (MND) said it detected seven Chinese military aircraft and five naval vessels operating around Taiwan from 6 am (local time) on Saturday and 6 am (local time) on Sunday. According to Taiwan's MND, one of the seven Chinese military aircraft crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait and entered Taiwan's Southwest Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). In response to Chinese action, Taiwanese armed forces monitored the situation and deployed combat patrol aircraft, naval vessels, and coastal missile systems, according to Taiwan's MND statement. In a post on X, Taiwan's MND stated, "7 PLA aircraft and 5 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 am. *—ANI*

Teen boy armed with knife shot dead in Aus

MELBOURNE, 5 MAY

A 16-year-old boy armed with a knife was shot dead by police after he stabbed a man in the Australian west coast city of Perth, officials said Sunday. The incident occurred in the parking lot of a hardware store in suburban Willetton on Saturday night. The teen attacked the man and then rushed at police officers before he was shot, Western Australian Premier Roger Cook told reporters on Sunday. "There are indications he had been radicalized online," Cook told a news conference. "But I want to reassure the community at this stage it appears that he acted solely and alone," Cook added. A man in his 30s was found at the scene with a stab wound to his back. He was taken to a hospital in serious but stable condition, a police statement said. *—AP*

Israelis protest to demand hostage return

Negotiators have resumed long-running ceasefire talks in Cairo brokered by Egypt, Qatar

TEL AVIV, 5 MAY

Tens of thousands of Israelis rallied late into the night calling for a deal to bring hostages home, ahead of further ceasefire talks.

Protesters in Tel Aviv chanted "war is not holy, life is", with some accusing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of aiming to prolong the conflict in Gaza. It came as a Hamas delegation met mediators in Egypt on Saturday.

The group said there were no new developments, but added "a new round will begin" on Sunday. Negotiators have resumed long-running ceasefire talks in Cairo - brokered by Egypt and Qatar - on pausing Israel's offensive in Gaza in return for freeing hostages.

It is thought the wording being discussed involves a 40-day pause in fighting while hostages are released, and the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli jails. An adviser to the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said the group was looking at the latest proposal with "full seriousness".

But he repeated a demand that any deal would have to explicitly include an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and complete end to the war.

Netanyahu has repeatedly insisted his forces will press ahead with a ground offensive in Rafah *PHOTO: BBC NEWS/ AMIR LEVY*

In an interview with BBC, Israeli minister Amichai Chikli said the war will continue "until Hamas is eliminated". "We don't have the option to agree to a deal that includes ending the war or giving up a full-scale operation in Rafah," he added. Separately, an anonymous Israeli government official told local media on Saturday that Israel would "under no circumstances agree to end the war as part of an agreement to free our abductees".

They added: "The IDF will enter Rafah and destroy the remaining Hamas battalions there - whether there is a temporary pause to free our captives or not." Netanyahu has faced pressure from within his far-right coalition to press ahead with the long-promised offensive in Gaza's southern-most city, where an estimated 1.4 million people have taken shelter after fleeing fighting in northern and central parts of the strip.

The US - Israel's biggest diplomatic and military ally - is reluctant to back a new offensive that could cause significant civilian casualties, and has insisted on seeing a plan to protect displaced Palestinians first.*—BBC News*

Islamic Jihad commander killed in Rafah: Israeli army

JERUSALEM, 4 MAY

Aiman Zaarab, senior commander of Rafah Brigade *PHOTO: X/@IDF*

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced on Saturday that Aiman Zaarab, a senior commander of the Islamic Jihad Rafah Brigade, was killed in an airstrike on the southernmost Gazan city of Rafah. Zaarab directed the Islamic Jihad's elite forces during the 7 October onslaught on Kibbutz Sufa and the Sufa military post bordering the Gaza Strip, said the IDF in a statement.

Zaarab had "commanded and directed" several attacks, and over the past few days, he led the Islamic Jihads' preparations for a combat in the southern Gaza Strip against the Israeli military, according to the statement.

Calling Israeli PM Netanyahu's stance on sending ground soldiers into Rafah as the main stumbling point in ceasefire talks, Hamas official said, "We are eager to reach an agreement, but not at any cost," further adding "full responsibility for insisting on entering Rafah instead of ceasing the aggression".

Meanwhile, Hamas has said that it would not agree to any Gaza ceasefire that does not involve a complete end to the war. *—Courtesy, Xinhua*

ENTERING A NEW ERA

Putin begins another 6-year term in Russia

MOSCOW, 5 MAY

Just a few months short of a quarter-century as Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin on Tuesday will put his hand on a copy of the constitution and begin another six-year term as president wielding extraordinary power.

Since becoming acting President on the last day of 1999, Putin has shaped Russia into a monolith — crushing political opposition, running independent-minded journalists out of the country and promoting an increasing devotion to prudish "traditional values" that pushes many in society into the margins.

His influence is so dominant that other officials could only stand submissively on the sidelines as he launched a war in Ukraine despite expectations the invasion would bring international opprobrium and harsh economic sanctions, as well as cost Russia dearly in the blood of its soldiers.

With that level of power, what Putin will do with his next term is a daunting question at home and abroad. The war in Ukraine, where Russia is making incremental though consistent battlefield gains, is the top concern, and he is showing no indication of changing course.

"The war in Ukraine is central to his current political project, and I don't see anything to suggest that that will change. And that affects everything else," Brian Taylor, a Syracuse University professor and author of "The Code of Putinism," said in an interview with Associated Press.

That will come at huge expense, which could drain money available for the extensive domestic projects and reforms in education, welfare and poverty-fighting that vPutin used much of the two-hour address to detail.

Putin "thinks of himself in the grand historical terms of Russian lands, bringing Ukraine back to where it belongs, those sorts of ideas. And I think those trump any kind of more socioeconomic-type programs," Taylor said. If the war were to end in less than total defeat for either side, with Russia retaining some of the territory it has already captured, European countries fear that Putin could be encouraged toward further military adventurism in the Baltics or in Poland. In a commentary in Foreign Affairs, Samorukov suggested that Putin's age could affect his judgment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is the longest-serving Russian or Soviet leader since Joseph Stalin *PHOTO: PTI*

- Putin to continue his animosity toward West, which he said in his state of the nation address "would like to do to Russia the same thing they did in many other regions of the world, including Ukraine

Putin is sure to continue his continue animosity toward the West, which he said in his state of the nation address "would like to do to Russia the same thing they did in many other regions of the world, including Ukraine: to bring discord into our home, to weaken it from within."

Putin's resistance to the West manifests not only anger at its support for Ukraine, but in what he sees as the undermining of Russia's moral fiber. *—AP*

HUNDREDS RESCUED FROM TEXAS FLOODS

HOUSTON, 5 MAY

High waters flooded neighborhoods around Houston on Saturday following heavy rains that resulted in crews rescuing more than 400 people from homes, rooftops and roads engulfed in murky water. Others prepared to evacuate their properties.

A flood watch remained in effect through Sunday afternoon as forecasters predicted additional rainfall and the likelihood of major flooding in Harris County, the nation's third-largest county which includes Houston, and nearby areas. "A lull in heavy rain is expected through evening," the National Weather Service reported. "The next round of heavy rainfall is expected late (Saturday) into Sunday."

Up to 3 inches of additional rain was expected, with up to 5 inches possible in isolated areas. Houston authorities have not reported any deaths or injuries. Judge Lina Hidalgo, Harris County's top elected official, said Saturday that 178 people and 122 pets had been rescued so far in the county. A wide region has been swamped from Houston to rural East Texas, where game wardens rode airboats through waist-high waters rescuing people and pets who did not evacuate in time. One crew brought a family and three dogs aboard as rising waters surrounded their cars and home. Friday's fierce storms forced numerous high-water rescues, including some from the rooftops of flooded homes. Officials redoubled urgent instructions for residents in low-lying areas to evacuate, warning the worst was still to come. *—AP*

Residents evacuate from a neighborhood flooded by heavy rains, in Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil, Saturday *PHOTO: AP/PTI*

Southern Brazil floods kill 39 people

SAO PAULO, 5 MAY

Heavy rains in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul killed 39 people, with another 68 still missing, the state civil defense agency said Friday, as record-breaking floods devastated cities and forced thousands to leave their homes.

It was the fourth such environmental disaster in a year, following floods in July, September and November 2023 that killed 75 people in total.

The flooding statewide has surpassed that seen during a historic 1941 deluge, according to the Brazilian Geological Service. In some cities, water levels were at their highest since records began nearly 150 years ago, the agency said.

On Thursday, a dam at a hydroelectric plant between the cities of Bento Goncalves and Cotipora partially collapsed and entire cities in the Taquari River valley, like Lajeado and Estrela, were completely overtaken by water. In the town of Feliz, 80 kilometers from the state capital, Porto Alegre, a massively swollen river swept away a bridge that connected it with the neighboring city of Linha Nova.

Operators reported electricity, communications and water cuts across the state. More than 24,000 people had to leave their homes, according to the civil defense agency. Without internet, telephone service or electricity, residents struggled to provide updates or information to their relatives living in other states. Helicopters flew continually over the cities while stranded families with children awaited rescue on the rooftops. Isolete Neumann, 58, lives in the city of Lajeado in the Taquari River valley and told Associated Press she has never before seen a scenario like the one she is now experiencing. "People were making barricades in front of hospitals with sand and gravel. It felt like a horror movie," she said by phone. Some people in her region were so desperate, she added, that they threw themselves into the water currents. *—AP*

Ukraine marks its third Easter at war

KYIV, 5 MAY

As Ukraine marked its third Easter at war, Russia launched a barrage of drones concentrated in Ukraine's east where the situation on the front line is worsening. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians in an Easter address to be united in prayer and called God an "ally" in the war with Russia.

Ukraine's air force said on Sunday that Russia had launched 24 Shahed drones, of which 23 had been shot down by air defences. Six people, including a child, were wounded in a drone strike in the eastern Kharkiv region, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

Fires broke out when debris from drones that were shot down fell on buildings in the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region. No casualties were reported. Officials in Kyiv urged residents to follow Orthodox Easter services online due to safety concerns. Serhiy Popko, head of the Kyiv city administration, warned that "even on such bright days of celebration, we can expect evil deeds from the aggressor."

Zelenskyy called on Ukrainians to unite in prayer for each other and soldiers on the front line. In a video filmed in front of Kyiv's Saint Sophia Cathedral, wearing a traditional Vyshyvanka embroidered shirt, Zelenskyy said that God "has a chevron with the Ukrainian flag on his shoulder." With "such an ally," Zelenskyy said, "life will definitely win over death."

A majority of Ukrainians identify as Orthodox Christians, though the church is divided. Many belong to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church was loyal to the patriarch in Moscow until splitting from Russia after the 2022 invasion and is viewed with suspicion by many Ukrainians. *—AP*

Zelenskyy called on Ukrainians to unite in prayer for each other and soldiers on the front liner *PHOTO: AP*

Aus MP claims she was drugged & sexually assaulted

QUEENSLAND, 5 MAY

Queensland Labour MP Brittany Lauga has alleged she was drugged and sexually assaulted in the central Queensland town of Yeppoon last weekend, and claims other women may also have been similarly attacked.

Lauga posted a statement on social media, saying she had contacted police early on the morning of Sunday 28 April. "In the early hours of Sunday morning I went to the Yeppoon police station and Yeppoon hospital, after being drugged and sexually assaulted. Tests at the hospital confirmed the presence of drugs in my body which I did not take. This substance impacted me significantly. A police investigation is underway."

Brittany Lauga *PHOTO: X/@GUARDIANAUS*

She said in the week since the alleged assault she had been contacted by other women who might also have been drugged in the coastal town of Yeppoon, about 35km north-east of Rockhampton, on the same night.

A video, purported to be of the alleged assault of Lauga filmed from across the street, is circulating online. Lauga was alerted to its existence in the hours after she reported the assault to police. "This could have happened to anyone and tragically, it does happen to many of us," Lauga said.

"I have had multiple women contact me who have experienced the same thing in our town. It's not ok. We should be able to enjoy socialising in our town without the risk of being drugged or assaulted."

—The Guardian

SIKH ACTIVIST'S MURDER

Canada is a 'rule-of-law country': Trudeau

TORONTO, 5 MAY

Canada is a "rule-of-law country" with a strong and independent justice system and a fundamental commitment to protect its citizens, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said, a day after three Indian nationals were charged with the murder of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Nijjar, a Canadian citizen, was shot dead outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023.

Karan Brar, 22, Kamalpreet Singh, 22, and Karanpreet Singh, 28, all Indian nationals residing in Edmonton have been charged on Friday with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

"This is important because Canada is a rule-of-law country with a strong and independent justice system, as well as a fundamental commitment to protecting all its citizens," Trudeau said about the arrests on Saturday at a Toronto gala celebrating Sikh heritage and culture.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Tudeau attending a press conference on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

"As the RCMP stated, the investigation remains ongoing, as does a separate and distinct investigation not limited to the involvement of the three people arrested yesterday," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) quoted Trudeau as saying.

India has dismissed Trudeau's charges as "absurd" and "motivated."

The presence of Sikh separatist groups in Canada has long frustrated India, which had designated Nijjar a "terrorist." After three Indian nationals were arrested in connection with the murder, Police in Canada said they had worked with US law enforcement agencies, without giving additional details.

Meanwhile, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday said what is happening in poll-bound Canada over the killing of Nijjar is mostly due to their internal politics and has nothing to do with India. He said a section of pro-Khalistan people are using Canada's democracy, creating a lobby and have become a vote bank. *—AP*

FDI easing in space sector to lure foreign players

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The government's decision to ease foreign direct investment (FDI) in the space sector will help attract foreign players as well as startups and will boost demand for high-tech jobs, experts say. The government has eased FDI norms in the sector by allowing 100 per cent overseas investment in making components for satellites, as part of efforts to attract overseas players and private companies into the segment. The provisions were notified last month. Sreeram Ananthasayanam, Partner, Deloitte India, said that the recent amendment of higher FDI limits in the space sector is a significant step towards transforming India's space program, in terms of infrastructure development. —*PTI*

Godrej to launch housing works worth Rs 30K cr

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Realty firm Godrej Properties plans to launch residential projects worth Rs 30,000 crore this fiscal across major cities to achieve 20 per cent growth in sales bookings amid strong demand, its executive chairperson Pirojsha Godrej said. He said, "We have given a sales bookings guidance of Rs 27,000 crore for the current fiscal, a 20 per cent growth from high base in 2023-24." In the last fiscal, the company's sales bookings jumped 84 per cent to a record Rs 22,527 crore, from Rs 12,232 crore in the preceding year. This is the highest sales reported so far by any listed entity for FY'24. Pirojsha said the housing demand continues to be strong, especially for reputed brands. "It (2023-24 fiscal) was a great year overall, whether you look at launches, sales, collection from customers, business development, deliveries of projects, cash flow and profit. We are really excited to see the kind of momentum in the business." he said.—*PTI*

Home loan outstanding up by ₹10L cr in last 2 yrs

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Credit outstanding to the housing sector rose by nearly Rs 10 lakh crore in the last two fiscals to reach a record Rs 27.23 lakh crore in March this year, according to Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) data on 'Sectoral Deployment of Bank Credit'. Experts from banking and real estate sectors attributed this growth in housing credit outstanding to a strong revival in the residential property market post-COVID pandemic on pent-up demand. According to RBI on sectoral deployment of bank credit for March 2024, the credit outstanding to the housing (including priority sector housing') stood at Rs 27,22,720 crore in March 2024, up from Rs 19,88,532 crore in March 2023, and Rs 17,26,697 crore in March 2022. The data also showed that the credit outstanding towards commercial real estate stood at Rs 4,48,145 crore in March 2024. It was at Rs 2,97,231 crore in March 2022. —*PTI*

Need industry, infra status for hospitality sector: HAI

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

There is an urgent need for the hospitality sector to be granted industry status at state level and infrastructure by the Centre for it to attract more investments and play a part in the development of 50 new destinations announced by the government, according to newly elected president of Hotel Association of India (HAI), KB Kachru. The sector is also hopeful that international tourist arrivals in India will reach pre-pandemic levels by March next year but ease of getting visas needs to be facilitated, while also taking up campaigns to promote the country as a destination globally. "Government declared 50 new destinations. Investors will be interested to invest in these destinations if the infrastructure is there," Kachru, who is also Chairman- South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, said. —*PTI*

Go First's situation painful; muted hopes for a tailwind

Experts say Go First might even be pushed into liquidation

MUMBAI/
NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Since 3 May, 2023, Go First has not taken to the skies — PHOTO: PTI

Last May, it all started with flight suspension for just three days and "an unfortunate decision" of voluntary insolvency resolution option taken to protect the airline's interests.

A year down the lane, the now plane-less Go First's fate remains uncertain and come June, there are revival expectations, though muted, when the extended deadline for the resolution process ends.

There are concerns that the airline might even be pushed into liquidation, experts opined. "It is extremely painful to see that even after one year, the airline has not been able to revive the operations," the budget carrier's former chief Kaushik Khona said.

Since 3 May, 2023, Go First has not taken to the skies, with its blue and white livery A320 planes gathering dust at airports, most staff leaving and many staring at uncertain times, and a resolution process still remaining on the tarmac. Hopes of a quick revival further faded, as the carrier's 54 planes have been deregistered after protracted legal battles and lessors will be taking away the aircraft.

Khona, who was at the helm when the more than 17-year-old airline filed for the voluntary insolvency resolution proceedings, said the staff were optimistic that operations could be resumed from August 2023.

Among others, the airline had made a pre-delivery payment of around USD 200 million to Airbus towards its second order for 72 planes. The first order by the carrier was for 72 aircraft, they added.

The sources also mentioned the airline's lawsuit worth about USD 3 billion against P&W.

Management consultancy Primus Partners' Managing Director Shravan Shetty said Go First seems to be headed unfortunately towards liquidation with the cost of revival increasing.

> Among others, the airline had made a pre-delivery payment of around USD 200 million to Airbus towards its second order for 72 planes. The first order by the carrier was for 72 aircraft, they added

Cut to the insolvency resolution process, the deadline for completing the process has been extended by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) till 3 June.

Two bidders are in the fray for Go First -- Busy Bee Airways, along with SpiceJet chief Ajay Singh, and Sharjah-based aviation entity Sky One.

In a statement, Sky One Chairman Jaideep Mirchandani said the Delhi High Court's directive adds the "much-needed clarity to the situation, aligning with our commitment to transparency and fairness in the bidding process."

Meanwhile, the insolvency resolution process of Jet Airways, which stopped flying back in April 2019, is still not complete. —*PTI*

CITES 'SHORT FILL'

Cipla, Glenmark recall drugs made in Indore from US

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Drug makers Cipla and Glenmark are recalling products from the American market due to manufacturing issues, according to the US health regulator US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA).

As per the latest Enforcement report issued by USFDA a New Jersey-based subsidiary of Cipla is recalling 59,244 packs of Ipratropium Bromide and Albuterol Sulfate Inhalation Solution.

The medication, produced at the company's Indore SEZ plant, is used to help control the symptoms of lung diseases, such as asthma, chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Cipla USA is recalling the affected lot due to "short fill". There were complaints of less fill volume in respule and few drops of liquid observed in the intact pouch, USFDA said.

Cipla initiated the Class II recall in the US market on 26 March this year.

USFDA also said that Glenmark Pharma is recalling 3,264 bottles of Diltiazem Hydrochloride extended-release capsules indicated for high blood pressure.

The US-based arm of the company -- Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Inc, USA -- is recalling the medication due to "failed dissolution specifications".

The company initiated the nationwide (US) recall on 17 April.

As per USFDA, a class II recall is initiated in a situation in which the use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote.

India is the largest supplier of generic medicines, with around 20 per cent share in the global supply by manufacturing 60,000 different generic brands across 60 therapeutic categories. —*PTI*

ECI nod taken before lifting ban on onion exports: Govt

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

The Centre has taken permission from the Election Commission of India (ECI) to lift the ban on exports of onion in view of the ongoing implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) due to the Lok Sabha elections, sources said.

According to government sources, the Department of Revenue under the finance ministry took the permission from ECI to lift the ban on onion exports, subject to conditions of 40 per cent export duty, and also a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 550 per tonne.

The government on Saturday lifted the ban on onion exports, a decision that can help boost income of a large section of farmers.

The decision to lift the ban on exports of onion was on the recommendation of the Department of Consumer Affairs, which monitors the availability and price situation of onion in the country.

Duty-free import of yellow peas extended

Also, India has extended the timeline for duty-free imports of yellow peas by four more months until October 2024, according to an official notification.

The decision assumes importance as it comes before the crucial Lok Sabha polls in key onion belts like Nashik, Ahmednagar and Solapur in Maharashtra. Farmers of this region have been demanding a lifting of the ban so that they can get a better price for their produce. In early December, government allowed duty-free imports of yellow peas until March 2024, later to be extended till April and then June. It was to cool the prices of the overall pulse basket.

Reportedly, the duty on yellow peas was first implemented in November 2017 at 50 per cent. India largely imports yellow peas from Canada and Russia. —*PTI/ANI*

FPIS RETURN AS BUYERS IN INDIAN STOCK MARKET

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have again returned as net buyers in the Indian stock market in May. Till 3 May, they bought equities worth Rs 1,156 crore in India, data from National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) showed.

In April, FPIs turned net sellers in Indian stocks, as the ongoing geopolitical crisis in the Middle East then likely pushed investors to take money off their portfolios.

FPIs, who continued to remain net buyers for the third month until till mid-April, have cumulatively sold stocks worth Rs 8,671 crore by the end of the month, data showed.

Going back, FPIs aggressively sold Indian stocks and turned net sellers in the Indian equity market in January 2024, before turning net buyers thereafter. In February and March, they were net buyers. India's GDP grew at a massive 8.4 per cent during the October-December quarter of the current financial year 2023-24. —*ANI*

FALL $2.41 BILLION

Forex reserves decline for third week

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

India's foreign exchange reserves declined for the third week, after having risen for the seventh straight week to hit an all-time high of USD 648.562 billion.

As per the latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), foreign exchange kitty declined by USD 2.412 billion to USD 637.922 billion in the 26 April week.

India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the biggest component of the forex reserves, declined by USD 1.159 billion to USD 559.701 billion, the central bank's weekly statistical data showed.

Gold reserves during the week declined by USD 1.275 billion to USD 55.533 billion.

India's foreign exchange reserves, which had reached an all-time high are sufficient to cover 11 months of projected imports, according to the Monthly Economic Review report of the Department of Economic Affairs under the Ministry of Finance, released recently.

In the calendar year 2023, the RBI added about USD 58 billion to its foreign exchange kitty. In 2022, India's forex kitty slumped by USD 71 billion cumulatively. Foreign exchange reserves have risen about USD 18 billion, on a cumulative basis, in 2024 so far.

The country's foreign exchange reserves last touched their all-time high in October 2021. Much of the decline after that can be attributed to a rise in the cost of imported goods in 2022.

Also, the relative fall in forex reserves could be linked to the RBI's intervention, from time to time, in the market to defend the uneven depreciation in the rupee against a surging US dollar.

Typically, the RBI, from time to time, intervenes in the market through liquidity management, including through the sale of dollars, to prevent a steep depreciation in the rupee. —*ANI*

Russian coal imports jump nearly 3-fold

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Imports of metallurgical coal from Russia have spurted around three-fold in the last three years to around 15.1 million tonnes in 2023-24 mainly due to lower prices while the same from Australia have declined, according to a research firm.

Russia's share in India's metallurgical coal imports of 73.2 million tonnes (MT) has risen to around 21 per cent from around 8 per cent in 2021-22, research firm Big Mint said in a statement.

The import of metallurgical coal, which includes coking coal and pulverised coal injection (PCI), from Russia, stood at 5.1 MT, accounting for 8 per cent of India's total imports of 65.6 MT of the commodity in 2021-22. Metallurgical coal imports from Russia rose to 11.3 MT in 2022-23, accounting for 16 per cent of 69.9 MT met coal imports in that year. In 2023-24, met coal imports from Russia were 15.1 MT or 21 per cent of total met coal imports of 73.2 MT.

Australia, a major supplier of met coal to India, saw a decline in the commodity's exports to India. Australia supplied 50.7 MT of met coal in FY22, or 77 per cent of the total imports of India. Met coal shipments dropped to 42.2 MT in FY22, while market share also declined to 60 per cent. —*PTI*

Thermal plants have 68% of normative coal stocks

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

As many as 184 thermal power plants with a total generation capacity of 211 GW have 68 per cent of normative coal stock levels amid rising electricity demand due to soaring temperatures in the country.

According to the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) May 3 daily report, 184 plants, that are monitored by the CEA, have 47.78 million tonnes of coal stocks against the normative level of 70.55 million tonnes.

This assumes significance that peak demand will be 260 GW during this summer. The peak power demand was at an all-time high of 243 GW in September 2023. Peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day rose to 224.18 GW in April 2024 as against 215.88 GW in April 2023. The highest supply in a day has already touched 223.84GW on May 3, 2024, which is higher than 221.42 GW recorded in May 2023. The peak power demand met was 219.37GW on 1 May and 222.03GW on 2 May this year.

Experts say that demand could have been more than 224GW recorded in April but the unseasonal spell of rain reduced the requirement for cooling appliances like air conditioners —*PTI*

MAHINDRA, TATA RECEIVE RECORD PATENT APPROVALS

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Domestic automobile majors Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors have received a record number of patent approvals for a wide spectrum of product and process innovations in the last financial year. Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) received 674 approvals, its best-ever annual performance, while Tata Motors also witnessed the grant of 333 patents during the 2023-24 financial year.

M&M said it has received a record 674 patents in 2023-24, with the majority coming in from the Indian Patent office. "We understand the importance of being future-ready; therefore, we have made significant R&D investments to ensure that we stay ahead of the curve in terms of technology and talent," M&M ED & CEO (Auto & Farm Sectors) Rajesh Jejurikar said.

The auto major has so far been conferred 1,185 patents across multiple geographies. As of 31 March, 2024, the company has 193 applications awaiting patent approval. Cumulatively, it has filed 2,212 patent applications to date. M&M's patents cover a range of functions, such as powertrain (ICE & EV), vehicle mechanical systems, electronics, manufacturing processes, electric tractors, and advanced engineering, among others.

Tata Motors also received its highest-ever grant of 333 patents during the last fiscal, taking its total tally of granted patents to over 850. The company has also filed 222 patents and 117 design applications in FY24 —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

TO CHECK MONEY LAUNDERING

Financial Intelligence Unit arms itself with AI, ML tools

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

The new system uses natural language processing to analyse textual inputs like 'grounds of suspicion' PHOTO: PTI

India's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has operationalised an advanced 2.0 version of its information technology system, armed with artificial intelligence and machine learning tools, to check money laundering and terrorist financing crimes in the country's economic channels.

The upgrade of the technological backbone was required as the volume of data (suspicious transaction reports) flagged by banks and various other financial institutions to the FIU for analysis and further dissemination to investigative and intelligence organisations has been "increasing", a latest report for the 2022-23 fiscal said.

The agency was set up in 2004 to "play a decisive role in India's fight against the menace of money laundering and terrorism financing" under the legal setup of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The recently released report has been accessed by PTI which says that the Financial Intelligence Network (FINnet) 2.0 was envisaged as the country's regulatory environment has been changing, technology landscape has been evolving and hence an overhaul of the existing FINnet 1.0 system was required to achieve an efficient system of collection, processing and dissemination of financial intelligence.

The 2.0 version has capabilities of "advanced analytics" by employing artificial intelligence and machine learning tools and a strategic analysis lab to stay abreast with the developments in anti-money laundering and emerging technologies, the report said.

> The agency was set up in 2004 to "play a decisive role in India's fight against the menace of money laundering and terrorism financing" under the legal setup of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The new system also uses natural language processing (NLP) and text mining tools to analyse textual inputs like 'grounds of suspicion'.

The FINnet 2.0 is aimed to provide sophistication in FIU's "analytical and data processing capacity" and it comprises of three sub-systems.

While FINGate is meant for information collection from banks, financial institutions and intermediaries, FINCore is for analytics by FIU experts and FINex is used for disseminating financial intelligence reports to probe agencies like the Income-tax department, ED, CBI, DRI and snooping organisations like the IB, military intelligence and the NTRO among others.

FINCore, the most important vertical of this technology setup, uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to generate summaries and sharing suspicious transaction reports with various law enforcement agencies based on risk profile, it said.

It said that as the FIU deals with "sensitive" financial data, confidentiality and data security were important component of the upgraded IT system. —*PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Messi has a record-setting win over Red Bulls

FORT LAUDERDALE, 5 MAY

Lionel Messi had a record-setting night for Inter Miami. He scored a goal and had five assists as Inter Miami trounced the New York Red Bulls 6-2 on Saturday night — with the Argentine great and eight-time Ballon d'Or winner as the game's best player setting no fewer than three Major League Soccer records. Messi, who earned the MLS Player of the Month Award for April, has now scored and assisted in six consecutive league matches."It has become redundant but it appears that he is always making history,".—*AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Haaland produces a monstrous four-goal show

DUBAI, 5 MAY

The Norwegian filled his boots to effectively ensure he will be collecting the Premier League's Golden Boot for a second year in a row Never doubt Erling Haaland. Erling Haaland produces monstrous four-goal showing as Arsenal's fading Premier League title hopes get little help from Gary O'Neil That was the lesson from his striking masterclass in a devastating 5-1 win over a helpless Wolves side. The Norwegian plundered four goals, effectively guaranteeing he will be winning the Premier League's Golden Boot for a second season, and he went a long way to ensuring he and his teammates will be lifting the title yet again. Haaland had missed the FA Cup semi-final with a small injury but by scoring from the bench last weekend at Nottingham Forest.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Sunil Gavaskar Lauds RCB's Siraj for Exploits vs GT

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Mohammed Siraj's self-belief and never-say-die attitude are his real strengths, said batting legend Sunil Gavaskar after the pacer set up Royal Challengers Bengaluru's four-wicket win over Gujarat Titans in the Indian Premier League here. Siraj's two-wicket burst in the powerplay to remove Shubman Gill and Wriddhiman Saha played a crucial role as GT could manage just 147 all-out in 19.3 overs on Saturday.—*PTI*

Women's T20 WC: India and Australia placed in Group A

DUBAI, 5 MAY

India was on Sunday placed in Group A alongside defending champions Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan in the Women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in Bangladesh from October 3-20 this year. With all their group matches scheduled to be played at Sylhet, India will open their campaign against New Zealand on 4 October and face off against arch-rivals Pakistan on 6 October as the ICC announced the schedule for the ninth edition of the Women's T20 WC.—*PTI*

Jadeja's all-round show propels CSK to big win

CSK now have 12 points with 3 more matches left to secure their playoff spot

DHARAMSALA, 5 MAY

Ravindra Jadeja orchestrated a masterclass all-round show as Chennai Super Kings regained their winning touch with a comprehensive 28-run win over Punjab Kings in a low-scoring IPL fixture here on Sunday.

Wily leg-spinner Rahul Chahar (3/23) and seamer Harshal Patel (3/24) put up a spirited show but Jadeja made a crucial 43 that came off just 26 balls to prop CSK to a par 167/9 after they were sent in to bat by Sam Curran.

The left-arm spinner then returned to grab three for 20 in four overs in the crucial middle-over phase to derail PBKS' chase, which ended at 139 for nine.

Mitchell Santner, who was playing his first match of the season, was brilliant during his tidy 1/10 from three overs.

Eyeing to secure a sixth successive win over CSK in the IPL, PBKS found themselves at 78 for seven against Jadeja's match-turning spell.

Having lost three of their last four matches, the five-time champions CSK thus returned to winning ways and jumped to third place in the standings.

CSK now have 12 points with three more matches left to secure their playoff spot.

PBKS – eight points from 11 matches – slumped to eighth spot after enduring their seventh loss of the season.

Jadeja gave away just three runs in his next over and completed a decisive spell ousting Curran (7) and the in-form Ashutosh Sharma (3) in the 13th over.

Ravindra Jadeja's 3 for 20 wrecked Punjab Kings' chase PHOTO: PTI

As runs dried up, Curran started to feel the heat and took on Jadeja's widish delivery but he slapped it straight to Santner at long-off.

Ashutosh then perished after mistiming his big hoick to be caught by Simarjeet at third-man to give Jadeja a three-for.

Earlier, at 60/1 in Power Play, CSK were going great guns with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad (32) and Daryl Mitchell in the middle during an entertaining 57-run partnership when Chahar triggered a collapse taking two wickets in two balls.

The partnership was halted as CSK went on to lose three wickets in 11 balls with Harshal taking the dangerous-looking Mitchell (30; 19b, 2x4, 1x6) in a controversial DRS call. Harshal returned at the death to dismiss Shardul Thakur (17) and MS Dhoni for a golden duck as CSK's hopes for a revival went up in smoke.

But the Yellow Army left in disbelief as the talismanic Dhoni departed in the very first ball, unable to counter Harshal's impeccably executed slow yorker. With no time to bring his bat down, Dhoni's off-stump was knocked over.

Punjab kept chipping away at wickets but it was Jadeja who remained firm, quietly going about his ways picking the odd boundaries and sixes to take them to a par-score. After a silent penultimate over that yielded just two runs for two wickets, Jadeja held his nerves and took on Arshdeep in the final over hitting him for a boundary and a six.

Brief Scores:

Chennai Super Kings: 167 for 9 in 20 overs (Ravindra Jadeja 43; Rahul Chahar 3/23, Harshal Patel 3/24).

Punjab Kings: 139 for 9 in 20 overs (Prabhsimran Singh 30, Shashank Singh 27; Ravindra Jadeja 3/20). —*PTI*

IPL 2024

Hyderabad eye must-win clash against Mumbai

MUMBAI, 5 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

A confident Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to produce a dominant show against a frail Mumbai Indians outfit and move up in the Indian Premier League points table when the two teams clash here on Monday. Placed fourth in the IPL points table with 12 points in 10 matches with six wins and four losses, SRH will be desperate to produce an all-round show and make improvements, especially in their bowling department.

The Pat Cummins-led side is amid an intense battle between multiple teams who are bidding for spots in the final four, with Rajasthan Royals (16 points), Kolkata Knight Riders (14 points) and Lucknow Super Giants (12 points) placed above SRH. Chennai Super Kings (5th with 10 points) and a resurgent Delhi Capitals (6th with 10 points) are breathing down SRH's neck, a scenario that would force the 2016 winners to shrug off any rust and get ready for an intense mid-table battle. SRH would be high on confidence having pipped the table-toppers RR by just one run in their previous outing. —*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai

UBER CUP

China's Chen Yu Fei holds up the Uber Cup after leading Team China 3-0 to win over Team Indonesia in the final of the Uber Cup held in Chengdu PHOTO: AFP

China wins Uber Cup for 16th time, beats Indonesia

CHENGDU, 5 MAY

China underlined its supremacy by beating Indonesia to win the Uber Cup for the 16th time on Sunday. China, which lost the final to South Korea in Bangkok two years ago, routed Indonesia 3-0, playing its first Uber Cup final since 2008.

Olympic champion Chen Yu Fei gave China a perfect start perfectly started China when she defeated Gregoria Mariska Tunjung 21-7, 21-16. The Chinese pair of world No. 1 Chen Qing Chen and Jia Yi Fan then outplayed Siti Fadia Silva Ramadhanti and Ribka Sugiarto 21-11, 21-8 for a commanding 2-0 lead. Teenager Ester Nurumi fought hard for Indonesia before He Bing Jiao recovered to win 10-21, 21-15, 21-17.

"Last time it was a shame that we couldn't win the Uber Cup, so over the last two years we were always ready, and we were playing at home," said He. Later on Sunday, both nations will meet in the Thomas Cup final. For the first time since 2012, the same countries will be playing in both the men's and women's finals. —*PTI*

PUJARA HITS FIRST TON OF COUNTY SEASON

LONDON, 5 MAY

India batter Cheteshwar Pujara's unbeaten 104 helped Sussex extend its first innings lead to 111 runs in its County Championship Division Two match against Derbyshire.

Pujara's unbeaten 167-ball knock was studded with 10 fours as he notched up his first hundred of the County season in his third match, having scored 86 and 44 not out against Gloucestershire and 38 in his only outing against Leicestershire.

On Saturday, Sussex reached 357 for five riding on Pujara's ton and fifties from Tom Haines (58), Tom Alsop (64), and James Coles (72) in reply to Derbyshire's first innings total of 246 in an away game at the County Ground in Derby. —*PTI*

Cheteshwar Pujara PHOTO: AFP

Indian men's 4x400m team fails to finish World Relays heat race

Nassau, 5 MAY

Second leg runner Rajesh Ramesh pulled out due to cramps as the Indian men's 4x400m team failed to finish its heat race at the World Athletics Relays here on Sunday, during round one of the Paris Olympics qualifications.

The Indian quartet of Muhammed Anas Yahiya, Rajesh Ramesh, Muhammed Ajmal, and Amoj Jacob was hoping to book a Paris ticket with a top-two finish in heat number four, but in utter heartbreak, Ramesh left the race midway while clutching his left leg. Anas had already run the first leg.

"The men's 4x400m relay team had a good start. Muhammad Anas clocked 45.93 seconds in the first leg,

Rajesh Ramesh falls due to cramps PHOTO: PTI

but the second runner -- Rajesh Ramesh -- fell due to cramps in leg muscles at the first bend," the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) said in a statement.

Ramesh had run the mixed 4x400m race three hours before the men's event.

India will have another chance on Monday during round two of Olympics qualifications where all the other teams that finished outside the top two in their respective heats on Sunday will try their luck for another shot at the Paris Games. —*PTI*

Bajrang Punia handed provisional suspension

NEW DELHI, 5 MAY

Bajrang Punia has been handed a provisional suspension for refusing to give his sample for the dope test during recent trials and the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is furious that NADA kept it "in the dark" on the development and is planning to write to World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) on the matter.

Bajrang was handed provisional suspension on April 23 by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) and asked to send his reply by May 7 to avoid further disciplinary action.

The trials to pick the men's national team for the Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Bishkek were held in Sonepat on March 10 and Bajrang had walked off the venue without providing his urine sample after losing his bout.

Reacting to his suspension, Bajrang said he never refused to provide his sample to NADA officials. "I want to clarify that I never refused to give my sample to NADA officials. I requested them to first answer me as to what action they took on the expired kit they brought to take my sample and then take my dope test," Bajrang wrote on X. "My lawyer Vidush Singhania will reply to this letter," he wrote further.

The Tokyo Games bronze medallist also posted a video in which he displayed "expired kits" being sent for sample collection and asked the official why such kits were brought.

The video is from the time a dope sample-collecting officer visited him to take samples. In the video, Bajrang said he was fortunate to have a team that noticed the expiry date and what would have innocent junior wrestlers done in case such kits reached them.

He also alleged that former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was using such kits to scare women wrestlers who had the guts to come out in the open against him.

"I am not blaming you. This is the work of the big crocodiles sitting above. Money talks in these matters," he was heard telling the officer in the video.

If Bajrang fails to come out clean with his reply, he will be out of the race for the Paris Olympic Qualification. —*PTI*

Bajrang Punia has been handed a provisional suspension for refusing to give his sample for the dope test PHOTO: PTI

Iga Swiatek says she drew inspiration from Rafael Nadal PHOTO: AFP

IGA SWIATEK BEATS ARYNA TO WIN MADRID OPEN

ROME, 5 MAY

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek came through "the most intense and crazy final" she has ever contested to avenge her loss to Aryna Sabalenka in last year's Madrid final with a grueling three-hour 11-minute victory in the Spanish capital on Saturday.

Coming back from 1-3 down in the decider and saving three match points in total, Swiatek claimed a 7-5, 4-6, 7-6 (9/7) victory to secure the Madrid Open trophy for the first time. "Well, who is going to say now that women's tennis is boring, right?" said Swiatek. Swiatek, who picked up the 20th title of her career, and ninth at the WTA 1000 level, has now won her last eight consecutive finals and joins Elena with a tour-leading 30 victories this season. The 22-year-old Pole confessed she felt tight in the first two hours of the contest but drew inspiration from Rafael Nadal. —*AP*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Chelsea run riot against WH on a damaging day for Moyes

ASTANA, 4 MAY

Chelsea kept up their electric goal-scoring form at home and boosted their hopes of European Football with a 5-0 thrashing of West Ham

Mauricio Pochettino's side has now scored 22 times in their last six Premier League games at Stamford Bridge, and here there was a fluency to their attacking play that could well have yielded substantially more than the five they put past the hapless visitors.

Chelsea were three up at the break. First, Cole Palmer netted the 21st league goal of his debut season in west London, steering a loose ball into the corner, then Conor Gallagher volleyed home.

Noni Madueke headed the third near the end of an excellent first half before Nicolas Jackson took his tally for the season to 13 in the league with a brace after the interval.

Noni Madueke (center) is congratulated by Cole Palmer (right) after he set up Chelsea's fourth goal for Nicolas Jackson (left) on Sunday PHOTO: AFP

Chelsea climbed to seventh after recording back-to-back league wins for the first time since January, and there is increasingly the feeling that, after a difficult start, the players are responding to their head coach's methods.

For David Moyes' Hammers, this was a calamitous display. Eliminated from Europe and now all but out of the race to qualify again next year, it was hard to avoid a sense of a promising season petering out as the Chelsea goals flew past Alphonse Areola and their players came to look more and more dejected. —*AP*